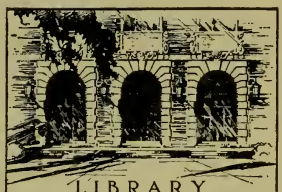
# THE MAN WITH A SECRET

FERGUS HUME



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# THE MAN WITH A SECRET.

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## A Novel.

BY

FERGUS HUME,

Author of

"THE MYSTERY OF A HANSOM CAB," "MADAME MIDAS," "THE PICCADILLY PUZZLE," "MISS MEPHISTOPHELES," ETC., ETC.

There are those in this world whose egotism is so profound, that they look upon creation as designed for their sole benefit, and take advantage of all opportunities furnished by Fate, to gain unto themselves exceeding riches and honour, although prosperity to one may mean ruin to many.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*

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# CONTENTS.


| CHAP. | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I. | The Diplomacy of Basil Beaumont | 1 |
| II. | A Fantastic Theorist | 17 |
| III. | The Village Concert | 31 |
| IV. | Anteros | 47 |
| V. | The Fall of Man | 64 |
| VI. | Jam, Jam efficaci do manus scientiae | 84 |
| VII. | When in Doubt—Play Trumps | 103 |
| VIII. | The Good Samaritan | 120 |
| IX. | Phantasmagoria | 137 |
| X. | The End of all Things | 152 |
| XI. | Mr. Beaumont Wins his Case | 163 |
| XII. | A Dexterous Arrangement | 179 |
| XIII. | Una makes a Confession | 194 |
| XIV. | The Squire's Will | 210 |


21 Mar 52 Boston

TO

My Dear Father,

JAMES HUME,

This Book is Affectionately Dedicated

By His Son,

FERGUS.

The mocking fiend who near us stands
  Entices us to evil deeds;
He binds our souls in sensual bands
  The mocking fiend who near us stands;
But some good woman-angel pleads
  For mercy at Almighty hands;
With such for guide what mortal heeds
  The mocking fiend who near us stands?

# THE MAN WITH A SECRET

## CHAPTER I.

### THE DIPLOMACY OF BASIL BEAUMONT.

Astute is he who mere brute force despises
And gains by subtle craft all worldly prizes.

When the three gentlemen were comfortably seated in the vicar's study, Beaumont, without further preamble, explained his errand.

"You know, sir," he said to genial Dr. Larcher, "that Blake has a very fine voice —a phenomenal tenor voice, which, when properly trained, will make his fortune. Blake tells me he has not decided what line of life to take up, so I propose he should be a singer."

"Oh, I should like it above all things," cried Reginald with the usual thoughtless impulse of youth.

"Wait a moment," observed the vicar cautiously. "I am not much in favour of a theatrical career for you, Reginald, and, this is too important a matter to be decided lightly, so I would like to hear Mr. Beaumont's views on the subject.

"Oh, my views are easily explained," said Beaumont coolly. "I know very well your objections to a theatrical career, Doctor Larcher, and no doubt it is full of temptations to a young man, still, Blake need not sing on the stage, but make his appearance on the concert platform—good tenors are rare, so he will soon have plenty of work and make an excellent income."

"And what do you propose to do?" asked the vicar thoughtfully.

"That is the point I am coming to," explained Beaumont quickly. "I am not a

rich man myself, but I know many people in London who are wealthy; if Blake will come up to town with me, I will undertake to find sufficient money to give him a first class training as a singer; when he makes a success—and I have very little doubt he will do so—he can pay me back the money advanced and a certain percentage for the loan and risk; then of course he will have an excellent profession and be able to earn his own living."

"London is full of temptation to a young man," observed Dr. Larcher, doubtfully.

"A young man must take his chance about that," replied Beaumont satirically. "Of course Blake will be with me and for my own sake I will do my best to keep him out of harm's way; but you surely don't want him to stay in this village all his life, wrapped up in cotton wool?"

"I'm not in the habit of being wrapped up in cotton wool," cried Reginald, piqued

at the artist's tone, "and I daresay if I were in London I could look after myself without anybody's help."

"I've no doubt you could," replied Beaumont, cordially, "all I offer you is assistance. Now what do you say, Dr. Larcher?"

"At present, I can say nothing," answered the vicar slowly. "Reginald is as dear to me as if he were my own son, and the choice of a career is not lightly to be decided upon. I had hoped he would become a curate, and then there would have been no necessity for his leaving me."

"I don't think I would have made a good curate," said Blake shaking his head, "and though I love this dear old village very much, yet I want to see a little of the world —my voice is my only talent, so the sooner I make use of it the better."

"*Quod adest memento componere æquus*," quoted the vicar significantly.

"*Dum loquimur, fugerit invida ætas,*" replied Reginald quickly.

"Fairly answered," said the vicar with a half sigh. "Yes, I suppose you must take advantage of flying time and it is no use for you to waste your life in idleness. Would you like to be a singer?"

"I think so," said Blake after a pause. "Of course I am anxious to make my own way in the world, and unless I make use of my one talent I do not see how I am to do it."

"I wish I had your one talent," observed Beaumont, rather enviously; "I would not rail against fate—well Dr. Larcher, and what is your decision?"

"I cannot give it to you now," said the old man rising, "it is too important a matter to be dismissed lightly. I will let you have an answer in a few days. Still, Mr. Beaumont I must thank you for your kind intentions regarding Reginald."

"Only too glad to be of service," replied Beaumont, with a bow.

"Meantime," said the vicar genially, "you must stop and have some dinner with us."

"Delighted," responded Beaumont, and went away with Reginald, very well satisfied with the result of the interview.

After dinner, hearing that a visitor was in the house Mrs. Larcher, who had been lying down all day under the influence of "The Affliction," made her appearance and greeted Beaumont with great cordiality.

"So pleased to see you," she said graciously, when she was established on the sofa amid a multiplicity of wraps and pillows; "quite a treat to have some one to talk to."

"Come, come, my dear, this is rather hard upon us," said the vicar good-humouredly.

"I mean some one new," explained Mrs.

Larcher graciously. "I am so fond of company, but owing to my affliction see very, very few people; it's a great deprivation to me I assure you."

"No doubt," assented Beaumont, rather bored by the constant flow of Mrs. Larcher's conversation, "but I hope you will soon quite recover from your illness and then you can mix with the world."

"Never, ah never," murmured Mrs. Larcher, looking up to the ceiling. "I'm a wreck—positively a wreck—I will never, never be what I was—I suffer from so many things, do I not, Eleanora Gwendoline?"

"You do, mama," replied that damsel who was seated at the piano. "But you would not object to a little music, would you, dear?"

"If it's soft, no," answered the invalid wearily, "but dear Reginald, do not sing loud songs, they are so bad for my nerves."

"All right," replied Reginald, and forth-

with sang a sentimental ditty called "Loneliness," which had dreary words and equally dreary music.

"I do wish song writers and their poets would invent something new," observed Beaumont when this lachrymose ballad came to an end, "one gets so weary of broken hearts and all that rubbish."

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Beaumont," said Dr. Larcher emphatically. "I observe in the songs of the present day a tendency to effeminate bewailings, which I infinitely deplore. We have, I am afraid, lost in a great measure, the manliness of Dibdin and the joyous ideas of the Jacobean lyrists."

"What about the sea songs?" asked Dick, "they are jolly enough."

"No doubt," replied Beaumont, "'Nancy Lee' and the 'Three Jolly Sailor Boys,' have a breezy ring about them, but this sugar and water sentimentality now so much in vogue is simply

horrible—it's a great pity a reaction does not set in, then we would have a more healthy tone."

"Still there is a fascination about sorrow which neither poet nor musician can resist," observed Ferdinand Priggs, who was anxious to read one of his poems to the company.

"I dare say," said Beaumont quickly; "but there is a great tendency to morbidness, too much use of broken hearts and minor keys, in fact the whole tendency of the age is pessimistic—we are always regretting the past, deploring the present, and dreading the future."

"I think that has been the case in all ages of the world," observed the vicar; "man has invariably talked of the prosperity of the past, and the decadence of the present."

"The past is past, and the dead are dead," murmured the poet thoughtfully.

"A quotation?" asked Beaumont, struck with the remark.

"From a poem of my own," said Ferdinand quickly, "which I would like to read."

"By all means, my boy," asserted the vicar heartily. "Read on."

All the company glanced at one another, and Dick groaned audibly, while Mrs. Larcher settled herself in her pillows with a sigh of resignation. But the poet rejoiced that he had succeeded in gaining a hearing, and producing from his pocket a carefully written manuscript read the following poem in a carefully modulated voice:—

## A BALLADE OF DEAD DAYS.

I.

Oh, I am weary of idle songs
  Of lords and ladies and olden time,
All their mirth to the past belongs,
  Sorrow sounds in our present rhyme.
  Joy-bells change to the death-bell's chime,
Age is bitter and youth hath fled,
  Gone is the season of hope sublime,
The past is past, and the dead are dead.

II.

Ladies I loved in those far-off days,
Where are ye now with your golden hair?
My locks are white 'neath a crown of bays,
But youth's rose-crown was to me more fair.
My heart was captured in many a snare
Enmeshed in ringlets of gold outspread,
Now in my heart lurks a bleak despair,
The past is past, and the dead are dead.

III.

Many the goblets of wine I quaffed
To health of dames who were fair and frail,
A kiss of the hand and a plumed hat doffed,
Then away to the wars in a coat of mail.
But, ah, that armour could not prevail
Against your eyes and your lips so red,
Nay, but such thoughts are a twice-told tale,
The past is past, and the dead are dead.

ENVOI.

Time, wilt thou never let me forget
Those perished days till I'm cased in lead?
Folly to dream with such vague regret,
The past is past, and the dead are dead.

"The style is Villon, I see," observed Beaumont, when the poet ended.

"It's more than the genius is," muttered Dick, who cherished a deadly hatred of Ferdinand's poetry.

"I like your refrain, my dear Ferdinand," observed the vicar graciously; "it has a certain pleasant lilt about it, but I'm afraid your verses are somewhat gruesome. Still, they have merit. Oh, yes, they have merit."

"I'm glad you think so," said the modest poet humbly, to whom praise was as rain to thirsty flowers. "I hope to do better soon."

"I've no doubt you will," said Beaumont, rather sorry for the poor youth, who was blushing painfully. "Your verses are, to a certain extent, an echo of Villon, still you have a musical ear, and that is a great thing; but if I may be permitted to give an opinion I rather think your views are a trifle pessimistic."

"Just what we were talking about," cried Reginald gaily. "A regret for the past and a lament for the present."

"It is the spirit of the age," sighed Ferdinand, putting the poem in his pocket. "It is hard to escape its influence."

"If any one has a chance of escaping it you ought to be the individual," said Beaumont, with a smile. "In London, where the latest ideas are floating in the air, it is difficult to be original, but down here, where the world is standing still, you ought to have struck out a new line. I'm afraid your poetry comes from books, not from Nature."

"Why so?" demanded Ferdinand, rather nettled.

"By the very fact that you used in that ballade an exotic form of rhyme, and the ideas therein are the dreary, hopeless sorrows of a worn-out world.

Sing, like Herrick of the things around you,

> 'Of brooks, of blossoms, birds and bowers,
> Of April, May, of June and July flowers.'

then you will probably strike a new note."

"I don't think much of Herrick," muttered Ferdinand proudly.

"Too cheerful, perhaps?" said Beaumont sarcastically. "That's a pity, as I see you are in danger of joining the dyspeptic school of poets, of whom we have been talking. Don't have too much gas-light about your muse, my dear boy, but let her be the buxom nymph of that charming old pagan, Robert Herrick."

"Your remarks are very sensible," observed the vicar heartily, as Beaumont rose to go. "If poetry must be written, let it be natural poetry. There is too much of the dissecting-table

and charnel-house about our modern rhymists."

"It's the dead world of the past which presses on the dying world of the present," said Ferdinand, gloomily.

"Oh, bosh!" cried Dick, in disgust. "Your liver's out of order, my dear chap, that's what's the matter with you."

The outraged poet withdrew in haughty dignity, while Beaumont took his leave of this kindly family circle, who pressed him to come again, so much had they enjoyed his company.

"Come again," muttered Beaumont to himself, as he strolled back to the inn, with a cigarette between his lips. "I should rather think so. I've won the vicar's heart by my disinterested affection for his *protégé*. It's wonderful, the effect of a little diplomacy — so much better than outward defiance. I think, my dear Patience, that should you take it into

your foolish head to malign me, you will find it a more difficult task than you think. Diplomacy is the only weapon I can use against a woman like you, and it's an uncommonly useful weapon when properly used.

## CHAPTER II.

### A FANTASTIC THEORIST.

"He is a man
Full of strange thoughts, and fancies whimsical,
Who dreams of dreams that make his life a dream.
And had he powers supernal at command,
Would tumble heaven itself about our ears
In his mad searchings for—I wot not what."

The room which Beaumont had turned into a studio while painting Squire Garsworth's portrait, overlooked the terrace on to which the French windows opened. It was the drawing-room of the Grange, and was magnificently furnished in the ponderous style of the Georgian period, though now, being but rarely used, an air of desertion and decay seemed to linger about it. The windows, however, being large and curtainless, there was an excellent light to paint by, so Basil established his easel near the

centre window, and placed the squire at one further along, in order that the full light should fall on his withered face, showing the multitudinous wrinkles and stern expression that made it a study worthy of Rembrandt. Beaumont often glanced at the attenuated form lying listlessly back in the great arm-chair, and wondered what curious event had changed this man from an idle reveller into an industrious scholar.

Above was the painted ceiling of the apartment, whereon gods and goddesses, in faded tints, disported themselves among dingy blue clouds, surrounded by cupids, sea-horses, rising suns and waning moons, while, below, a threadbare carpet covered the polished floor but imperfectly. A huge marble fireplace, cold and black-looking, heavy, cumbersome chairs, solid-looking tables, a quaint old spinet with thin legs, and several comfortable-looking sofas, filled

up the room. There were also grim-looking faces frowning from the walls, cabinets filled with grotesque china, now worth its weight in gold, bizarre ornaments from India and China, and many other quaint things, which made the apartment look like a curiosity-shop to the refined taste of the artist. But in spite of the old-time magnificence of the place, spiders spun their webs in the corners, grey dust lay thickly around, and a chill, tomb-like feeling pervaded the room. Even the cheerful sunlight could not lift the heavy shadow which seemed to brood over it, and it seemed, in its loneliness, to be a chamber of some enchanted palace, such as we read of in eastern tales.

Nor was the proprietor out of place in this decayed realm of former grandeur, for he looked old and weird enough to have been coëval with the pristine splendours of the Grange. The worn face, the sudden

gleams of insane fire from the deeply set eyes, the snowy, sparse hair that fell from under the black skull-cap, and the sombre robe, all seemed to be the semblance of some hoary necromancer rich in malignant spells of magic.

Had Randal Garsworth mixed with the world he would have been a different creature. Had he gone abroad among his fellow men and taken an interest in their ideas concerning politics, literature, and music, he would have retained a healthy mind by such generalization of his intellect. But, shutting himself up, as he had done, in a lonely house, and concentrating his mind upon himself, he lapsed into a morbid state which prepared him for the reception of any fantastical idea. While thus lingering in this unhealthy life, he chanced upon the curious doctrine of metempsychosis, and it speedily took possession of his diseased mind, already strongly inclined

towards strange searchings. The weirdness of the Pythagorean theory appealed to his love of the whimsical, and he became a monomaniac on the subject. Under the influence of a lonely life, ardent studies of the philosophers who supported the theory of transmigration, and his selfish application of these wild doctrines to his own soul, the monomania under which he laboured deepened into madness.

To all appearances he conducted himself in a rational manner, though slightly eccentric, but with his firm belief in metempsychosis, and his preparations for his future incarnation, he could hardly be called sane. Yet he conducted all business matters with admirable skill, and in spite of the dilapidated state of the Grange, his farms were well managed, and his tenants found no cause to complain of neglect on the part of their landlord. Like all madmen, he was a profound egotist, and

absorbed in his belief of a re-incarnation on this earth, he paid no heed to the claims of relatives or friends, neglecting all social duties in order to devote himself entirely to his favourite delusions. Such was the man who sat before Basil Beaumont, by whose skilful brush and genuine talent the strange face of the recluse was rapidly being transferred to the canvas in the most life-like manner.

"I hope this portrait will please you," said Beaumont, breaking the silence, which had lasted some minutes, "it's the best thing I have ever done."

"Is it?" replied Garsworth, vaguely, his mind being far away, occupied with some abstruse thought. "Yes, of course. What did you say?"

"I hope you'll like the picture," repeated Beaumont, slowly.

"Of course I will," said the squire, quickly. "I want to see myself in the

future as I am now. Some people look back on their portraits taken in youth, and see a faint semblance of their old age in the unwrinkled faces, but I will see this picture when in a new body which will have no resemblance in its form to the withered shape I now bear."

"A strange doctrine."

"As you say—a strange doctrine," said Garsworth, warming with his subject, "but a very true one. My body is old and worn out. Physically, I am an irreparable wreck, but my soul is as lusty, fresh and eager as it was in the days of my youth. Why, then, should not my true entity shed this worn-out, fleshly envelope as a snake does its skin, and enter into a new one replete with the vigour of youth?"

"A difficult question to answer," replied Beaumont, calmly, "very, very difficult. We have no proof that such a thing can happen."

"You are a materialist?"

"Pardon me, no. A materialist, as I understand the word, denies the independent existence of spirit; I do not. I believe our spirits or souls to be immortal: but, as to this re-incarnation theory—it is a dream of Pythagoras."

"It was a dream of many before Pythagoras, and has been the dream of many since," rejoined Garsworth, coldly. "The Egyptians, the Hindoos, and the Buddhists all accepted the doctrine, although each treated it according to their different religions. In our modern days Lessing believed in it; and if you have read the writings of Kardec, you will find that re-incarnation is the very soul of the spiritist belief."

Beaumont sneered.

"I can't say I have much faith in the maunderings of spiritualists. Table-turning and spirit-rapping may be very pleasant

as an amusement; but as a religion—bah!"

"You talk like that because you don't understand the subject. The things you mention are only the outward manifestation of spiritualism. If you read Kardec's books you would find that the true theory of spiritualism is transmigration. Spirits are incarnated in human bodies in order to work out their own advancement. If they resist temptation while in the flesh, they enter into a higher sphere, in order to advance another step. If they fail to lead a pure life, they again become re-incarnated in the flesh to make another effort; but they never retrograde."

"And you believe in this doctrine?" asked Beaumont, incredulously.

"With certain reservations—yes."

"And those reservations?"

"I need not mention all, but I will tell you one as an example. The spiritists

deny that we remember former existences —I believe we do."

"Oh! and you think in your next body you will remember your incarnation as Squire Garsworth?"

"I do."

"Do you remember your former existences?"

"Some of them."

"Why not all?"

"Because some of the lives I then lived were base in the extreme, and not worthy of remembrance, so I forgot them—in the same way as you forget disagreeable things and only have thoughts of agreeable events."

"Will you tell me some of your former existences?"

"It would be hardly worth while," replied the squire, irritably, "as you would only look upon my narration as a fairy-tale. But I can tell you what I was—

an Egyptian prince, a Roman soldier, a Spanish Moor, and an English pauper in the reign of Elizabeth."

Beaumont looked in astonishment at the old man, glibly running off this fantastic list.

"And since the pauper stage?" he asked, smothering a smile.

"I have been re-incarnated in this present form," responded the squire, gravely. "It is because I experienced poverty in my last existence that I am saving money now."

"I don't understand."

"To keep myself during my next incarnation."

The artist was becoming quite bewildered at hearing this farrago of nonsense uttered in such a serious tone. However, the conversation was so extraordinary that he could not forbear humouring the madman.

"A very laudable intention," he said, quietly; "but as you will be someone else in your next incarnation, how are you going to claim Squire Garsworth's money?"

"Ah!" responded the squire, with a cunning smile, "that is my secret. I have arranged all that in a most admirable way. I can claim my own money without any trouble."

"But suppose you are born a savage?"

"I will not be born a savage — that would be retrogression, and spirits never retrograde."

"Well," said Beaumont, rising to his feet, and putting his brushes away, "your conversation is getting too deep for me, Mr. Garsworth. I understand your metempsychosis theory all right, though I don't agree with it; but I fail to see how you are going to arrange about getting your own money."

"No, no!" replied Garsworth, raising his form, tall and gaunt, against the bright light outside, "of course not; that is my secret. No one will know—not one! Is your sitting finished?"

"Yes, for to-day."

"Come to-morrow—come to-morrow!" said the old man, coming round to look at the picture, "no time to be lost. I may die before it's done, and then I won't be able to see myself as I was; but Nestley will keep me alive. Good doctor—very good doctor—paid him handsomely—yes, handsomely! Good-bye for to-day, Mr. Beaumont. Don't forget to-morrow; I may die—no time to lose—good-bye!"

The old man shuffled tremulously out of the room, and Beaumont stood looking after him with a puzzled smile on his lips. He began to put his paraphernalia away slowly, and talked softly to himself meanwhile.

"I wonder if there's any sense in the old fool's ravings? I don't believe in this incarnation rubbish, but he's got some scheme in his head about that money—I'd like to find it out—there might be something in it by which I could benefit. He's a madman, sure enough, but still there is method in his madness. However, I'll try to discover his secret somehow."

He lighted a cigarette and sauntered out on to the terrace, thinking over the chances of finding out the Squire's secret with a view to turning it to his own account. Apparently his cogitations led to some result, for after standing for a few minutes at the end of the terrace in a brown study, he removed his cigarette from his mouth and uttered one word:

"Hypnotism."

## CHAPTER III.

### THE VILLAGE CONCERT.

The viols sound in festal hall
Where come the merry mummers all,
The minstrels sing their roundelay
Of doughty knights and ladies gay,
And as the carol music swells
The jester shakes his cap and bells,
While lords and dames of high degree
Approve the Christ-tide revelry,
And happy in the pleasant din
Amazed the foolish rustics grin.

The school-room was a long, old-fashioned apartment, with plain oak walls and a high roof. The wide windows were set low down, and when seated at their desks the scholars could look out and see the old stone cross of the market-place and the heavily foliaged elms that waved their green leaves in front of the queer, red-tiled houses. The walls were hung round

with maps of the five divisions of the world, and above the teacher's desk, which was set on a raised daïs, appeared a map of the world itself. On this occasion the ink-splashed desk of the teacher was removed, and in its place stood a small cottage piano. Dark red curtains hung down from brass rods on either side, so that the daïs was transformed into a very fair stage, while at the back decorative effect was obtained by a Union Jack being gracefully festooned over the Royal arms, painted by the village artist.

The desks of the scholars, being immovable, were left in their places, and the audience — which comprised nearly the whole population of the village—sat like rows of elderly pupils ready to be instructed. Forms and desks were ranged in the centre of the room, and there was a narrow walk on either side leading down to the wide door at the end of the build-

ing, which was continually opening and shutting to admit late arrivals and exclude a view of the festive preparations from the penniless crowd outside who could not afford the necessary coppers for entrance fee. Illumination was provided by six oil lamps, three on each side, set in metal brackets, and from the centre of the roof over the stage hung a larger lamp, while the piano was further adorned with two weakly-looking tallow candles for the convenience of the musician.

The school-mistress, Miss Busky, a dried-up prim-looking little woman, who resembled a cork fairy more than anything else, had further ornamented the bare room by wreathing round the maps and lamps strings of coloured paper flowers manufactured by artistically inclined pupils, and even the legs of the piano were swathed in these tissue paper decorations. Over the stage there was also a large

placard bearing the word "Welcome" wreathed with artificial flowers, so that Miss Busky on surveying her handiwork felt quite content with the general effect of luxury produced by herself and her satellites. The programmes were neatly written out by the best writers in the school, and handed only to favoured visitors as these efforts of penmanship were few in number. The visitors themselves, red, lusty country folk, had come from far and near to the concert, and the little school-room was uncomfortably full, but owing to the fierce efforts of Miss Busky, who bounced about like an india-rubber ball, everyone was at last comfortably settled.

Mrs. Larcher and Pumpkin taking no part in the performance were accommodated with front seats, together with many of the country gentry, who always patronised these entertainments at the urgent request of the vicar, who greatly believed

in good-feeling and friendliness existing between the lords of the soil and their tenants.

And now amid a great clapping of hands and stamping of heavily shod feet the popular vicar himself appeared on the stage as chairman, and took his seat beside a small table adorned with a jug of water, a glass and a programme.

Dr. Larcher made a short speech, ending with a quotation from his favourite poet:

> "Et thure et fidibus juvat
> Placare."

which hardly anyone understood, and then the serious business of the evening commenced.

The concert was opened by the indefatigable Miss Busky and Cecilia, who played a duet by a popular composer on popular airs, in which the said airs were almost smothered in variations, and blended one

with the other in a most surprising manner, for just as the audience recognized "Rule Britannia" and had settled themselves down for an intellectual treat the players broke off into "The Last Rose of Summer," and thence bursting into "Auld Lang Syne," melting, amid a perfect firework of runs, into "The British Grenadiers," which latter being played with full force by four hands, the loud pedal pressed down, brought the overture to an end in a noisy manner which delighted the audience.

Reginald then sang "Come into the garden, Maud," but this number evidently did not please them very much as they could not make out what it was all about and, preferring noise to delicacy, did not appreciate the beauty of the singer's voice. Beaumont, however, who was present, admired the item greatly, and said as much to Mrs. Larcher who, armed with a fan and

a smelling bottle, sat next to him fighting with "The Affliction."

"Oh yes," sighed Mrs. Larcher when she had got "The Affliction" well under and did not feel inclined to faint, scream, or kick, or give way to any other eccentricities which "The Affliction" was fond of doing at unseasonable hours, "his voice is beautiful, no doubt, but so loud, it goes through my head and rattles my nerves. I love soft songs that soothe me—something cradle-like—a Berceuse, you understand. I'm afraid you find me rather hard to please, but it's my affliction and not myself. I assure you, Mr. Beaumont, that a loud voice often prostrates me for days and leaves me a perfect object, does it not, Eleanora Gwendoline?"

Eleanora Gwendoline, alias Pumpkin, assented with alacrity to this remark, upon which Beaumont observed that he never should have thought it to look at her,

thereby inciting Mrs. Larcher to a weakly spasm of coquetry for she tapped Basil feebly with her fan and said he was a naughty man, then settled herself to listen to a glee by the choir.

The choirmaster, Simon Ruller, a long, thin individual, in a frantic state of excitement, having reduced his chorus to a state of abject nervousness, started them off in the glee "Glorious Apollo," and after two or three false starts they managed to begin. Having begun, their great aim was to get over the ground as rapidly as possible, and they rushed it through at lightning speed, Mr. Ruller imploring them in fierce whispers to observe the *rallentando*, which advice, however, they did not take. On disappearing from the stage, chased off by the excited Ruller, they were succeeded by Miss Cassy, attired in a startling costume of blue and yellow.

This lady's contribution to the proceed-

ings was a milk and water ballad of a semi-jocular kind, called "Almost a Case," and the way in which she leered and smirked at the audience from behind her music in order to point the meaning of the verses, was quite alarming. She paid no attention to time, and poor Cecilia was obliged to stop one minute and play furiously the next in order to follow Miss Cassy's spasmodic idea of rendering the song.

"So flippant," commented Mrs. Larcher when the fair songstress had retired, "a great want of decorum—she makes my nerves jump."

"It's the style of song, mama," said Pumpkin generously.

"Then why doesn't she choose less hoppy music?" retorted the matron fanning herself vigorously, "it makes me twitch to hear her. Ah, if she only had my affliction she wouldn't sing at all."

Beaumont privately thought this would

be an excellent thing for everyone, but did not say so, knowing Mrs. Larcher to be a great friend of Miss Cassy's.

Dick Pemberton gave a sea song with great vigour, and received genuine applause, then Una and Reginald sang "Oh, that we two were Maying," which the audience did not care about. The vicar then read Poe's poem of "The Bells" in a ponderous manner, which crushed the airy lines, and after another song from Reginald, Mr. Ferdinand Priggs appeared to recite an original poem "My Ladye Fayre."

Mr. Priggs was ushered in by a melancholy strain from the piano, and placing one hand in his breast and tossing back his long hair with the other, he burst into a series of questions about the fayre lady.

"Was it a dream of sadness
That reeled my brain to madness,
Or how
Did I see her brow
With its crown of golden gladness?"

After asking these questions Mr. Priggs proved conclusively that it was no dream, but .

"A wild, weird, wandering, warning dame
Who set the ears of all aflame
With loud acclaim."

The poet treated his audience to about twenty verses of this gruesome production, and having ended with a long sigh stood on the stage for fully a minute. Everyone waited to hear what he was going to say next, but the poetic Ferdinand doubled up his limp body into what he called a bow, and slowly drifted out of sight, his legs apparently taking him wherever they chose to go.

On the conclusion of this dismal poem the full company sang "God save the Queen," and the concert ended amid the congratulations of all concerned, as they decided it was a great success.

The vicar heartily congratulated the performers on the receipts, as after paying all

expenses there remained fully five pounds for the almshouse fund, to aid which the concert had been got up.

"Where is Dr. Nestley to-night?" asked Beaumont as they went out.

"He had to stay with the squire," replied Una, who was leaning on Reginald's arm, "he is not at all well."

"Nerves?" asked Mrs. Larcher anxiously, taking a medical interest in the case.

"Oh, dear no," said Miss Cassy lightly, "though he has got nerves—so very odd, isn't it? but this time the dear doctor says it's lungs—something gone wrong—a kind of what's-his-name thing, you know—if he doesn't take care he'll get that disease—something about a moan."

"Oh, pneumonia," observed Beaumont gravely. "I hope not, it's very dangerous, and to an old man like the squire, doubly so."

"I have had it," said Mrs. Larcher, who

by her own showing possessed every disease under the sun. "Acute inflammation of the lungs, it left me a wreck—a prostrate wreck—did it not, Eleanora Gwendoline?"

"It did, mama," replied the dutiful Pumpkin.

"It might come on again," said Mrs. Larcher, opening her smelling-bottle. "I'll have a cup of hot tea when I go home, and a hot bottle to my feet.

"I wonder she doesn't have a mustard plaister and a fly blister," whispered Dick to Una. "Might draw some of the bosh out of her."

Una laughed, and the great lumbering barouche of the Grange having arrived, driven by the stony Munks, she prepared to enter it, followed by the chattering Cassy.

"So cold, isn't it?" said that lady, "quite like the North Pole. Captain what's-his-name, you know, Parry, puts me

in mind of Paris—French style—so odd. I'll see you to morrow, Mr. Beaumont, and oh, Mrs. Larcher, will you come to tea next week—Thursday—what do you say, Una? Friday, oh yes—Friday."

"If my affiiction permits me," said Mrs. Larcher in a stately tone, "I will try."

"So glad," replied the volatile Cassy, "and you come also, Mr. Blake, and of course Mr. Pemberton, not forgetting Mr. Beaumont; so very nice to see one's friends. Oh, yes, Munks, we're quite ready, good-night—so pleased—delightful concert—odd—very odd."

Further talk on the part of Miss Cassandra was checked by the sudden start of the barouche, and what with the uneven road and the worn-out springs of the coach, Miss Cassy had enough to do to look after herself without talking.

Mrs. Larcher, leaning on the vicar's arm, walked home, followed by Pumpkin and

the three pupils, Dick chaffing Ferdinand over his poem till that poetic soul was nearly out of his mind with anger.

Beaumont, left alone at the school-room door, lit a cigarette, and was about to go when he heard a faint sigh behind him, and on turning saw Cecilia and the lively Busky.

"I enjoyed the concert very much, Miss Mosser," he said gracefully, as they passed him.

"I'm glad of that, sir," said Cecilia, who looked tired, "it went off very well. Was—was Dr. Nestley here?"

"No, he had to stay with Squire Garsworth."

The blind girl sighed again, and after saying good night, went away, followed by Miss Busky, who bounded along in the moonlight like a marionette.

"Poor girl," said Beaumont thoughtfully, "she loves Nestley, and won't have the

slightest chance with him, he's too much in love with Una Challenor. By-the-way, I must see Nestley: if I want to find out the squire's secret, I'll have to arrange matters with him—I hate watch-dogs."

## CHAPTER IV.

### ANTEROS.

Strong god thou art the enemy of gods,
A hater of blind Eros and his joys,
Thy rule is bitter as the stinging rods
That scourge at Dian's feast the Spartan boys;
Evil his soul who asks thine evil aid,
And in revenge such evil aid employs
In sundering the hearts of youth and maid.

The Garsworth family was never a very prolific one, but the estates had always descended in a direct line from father to son. Many a time the race seemed to be on the point of extinction, owing to the representative being an only child, yet though the line dwindled down to depending on one life alone for its continuity, it never absolutely died out. In the event of such a thing taking place, it would have

been difficult to say who would have succeeded to the estates, as the Garsworth family seemed to be averse to matrimony and their connection with the county families was, to say the least, doubtful. Besides, as there was no entail, the estates were completely at the disposal of the head of the family for the time being, and he could will them to whomsoever he pleased. As hitherto son had always succeeded father, there had been no necessity for the exercise of such a power, but now the sole representative of the race being unmarried, he was at liberty to use his own judgment in disposing of the estates.

In the opinion of right-minded people there could be very little doubt as to who should succeed the squire, for Una was the next of kin. She was the only living representative of the younger branch of the family, being the grand daughter of the squire's aunt, and therefore his second

cousin. Miss Cassandra, although she constantly alluded to Randal Garsworth as "my cousin," was as a matter of fact only a relative by marriage, being Una's paternal aunt.

Una's parents had died while she was a child, and she had been brought up by the kind-hearted though eccentric Miss Cassy, who sent her to Germany in order to complete her education. Miss Cassandra, having an income of three hundred a year, dwelt in London, where she was known among a select society of well-born fossils, who looked upon her as a mere child. Una, having finished her education, came back to England and took up her abode with Miss Cassy, and having an income of some two hundred a year, joined it to that of her aunt, and thus the two women managed to live very comfortable in a small way.

On seeing Una's beauty, however, Miss Cassandra had no intention that she should

live a dismal life in a smoky London suburb, without at least one chance of seeing the gay world, and marrying as befitted her birth and loveliness, so she wrote to Squire Garsworth on the subject. The old man sent in reply a gracious message that Una could come down and stay at the Grange, and that he would not forget her in his will. Miss Cassy, not knowing the idiosyncrasies of the recluse, saw in her mind's eye a hospitable country house full of joyous company, so persuaded Una to accept the invitation, saying she herself would go also. After some demur Squire Garsworth agreed to Miss Cassy coming, and in due time, having broken up their London home, the two ladies arrived at the Grange.

Their dismay was great at finding the sordid way in which the Squire lived, and Miss Cassy would have promptly

returned to London, only Una, being touched by the loneliness of her kinsman, determined to remain, persuading Miss Cassy to do likewise. So they lived quietly at the Grange on the somewhat begrudged hospitality of the old man, their own incomes obtaining for them any luxuries they might require, as they certainly received nothing but the bare necessities of life from their host.

In the mad pursuit of his delusion, Garsworth, in contrast to the lavishness of his youth, had become absolutely penurious in his mode of life. The large staff of servants necessary for such an immense house as the Grange, had been long ago dispensed with, and Patience Allerby, assisted by Jellicks, looked after the household, while the stony Munks exercised a grim sovereignty over the exterior arrangements. The Squire mostly lived in his own

study, and Una, aided by Miss Cassy, managed to make one room habitable for themselves, but the rest of the house was given over to the rats and spiders, becoming at last so lonely and eerie that Miss Cassy frequently declared it was haunted.

Una having fallen in love with Reginald, was quite content in her dreary exile, but Miss Cassy, used to the lively entertainments of the fossilized society in London, longed to get away from the place, and looked forward to the Squire dying with a certain ghastly eagerness, as she thought Una would then come in for all the estates, and they could once more live in London.

On the morning after the concert Miss Cassy and Una seated at a late breakfast, were talking seriously about the unsettled health of the Squire, who was now obviously breaking up.

"He's about seventy-three now," said Miss Cassy thoughtfully, "I'm sure he can't live long,"

"My dear Aunty!" replied Una in a shocked tone, "how can you talk so?"

"Why not?" retorted Miss Cassy indignantly. "He's not much use alive. I'm sure he'd be more use dead."

"Why?"

"Because you'd get his money and we could go back to dear London."

"I don't want his money," said Una with great spirit, "and certainly don't care about speculating on cousin Garsworth's death to gain it. I wonder at your doing so, Aunt."

"Well, I'm sure, Una," whimpered Miss Cassy, producing her handkerchief, "you are so odd—I only meant to say I'm tired of this place—it is dull—now isn't it? I need excitement, you know I need excitement—and after me bringing

you up. I always dressed you beautifully real lace—and kept you so clean. I always had your nerves attended to—you blame me now—I want to see you rich—it isn't odd—wishing to see you rich, and I'm so dull here; really Una, you are unkind—quite crushing—I'm only an ivy—oh, why wasn't I married? there's nothing for one to cling to—you don't want me to cling."

"My dear Auntie," said Una with a smile, "you are so sensitive."

"Ivy," sobbed Miss Cassy, "nerves—mother's side—you've got none—so very odd."

"I don't want you to think of the Squire dying, it won't benefit me at all."

Miss Cassy removed her handkerchief and gasped:

"Quite ten thousand a year—he can't take it away—you're his only relative—no one could be so odd as to leave it

to a what's-its-name asylum or a cat's-home."

"I don't know whom he'll leave the money to," said Una deliberately. "I certainly ought to get it, but you know the Squire's delusion about re-incarnation—you may depend his will is mixed up with the idea, how I don't know—but there will be some trouble at his death."

"Such an idiot he is," groaned Miss Cassy, "quite eccentric—hereditary—I've seen it in you—bad blood, you know—it's in all old families—our family was always sane."

To prove which sanity Miss Cassy arose from the table to go to her room, and placed the tea cosy on her head to protect her from cold. The eccentric lady walked to the door talking in a broken fashion all the time.

"I'm sure I don't want his money—

small income but sure—yes—but it's so dull—I love London—I can't blossom here—I'm like a cabbage—in town I expand—such nice amusements—Madame Tussaud's and the Crystal Palace—so exciting—it's food—food—oh, dear me, Dr. Nestley, is this you? how is my cousin? better?—so glad—it's very odd, isn't it? I mean it's not odd I'm glad—no—quite so—oh, you want to see Miss Challoner—yes—good-bye just now," and Miss Cassy, with the tea cosy perched on her head, disappeared, leaving Nestley alone with Una.

The young man was not looking well, as his ruddy colour had given place to an unhealthy paleness, his skin had a flaccid appearance and his countenance wore an anxious, haggard expression. His eyes glanced restlessly round the room looking at everything except Una, and he moved his hands nervously.

Even in his voice there was a change, for in place of his former bold confident tone he now spoke in a low hesitating manner.

"I just came to tell you the Squire is better, Miss Challoner," he said in an agitated voice, keeping his eyes on the ground.

"It's very good of you, doctor," she replied courteously. "I hope he will become quite strong again."

"I'm afraid not, his body is worn out and has not strength enough to resist disease—of course, now he has only a slight cold, but any chance exposure may affect his lungs seriously, and if pneumonia sets in I'm afraid he will have no chance."

"What is to be done?" she asked anxiously.

"I cannot do more than I have done, he must be kept quiet and warm. I've

persuaded him to take some strong soup which will do him good—in fact, I think his ascetic manner of living has had as much to do with his ill-health as anything else."

"I hope he will get well," said Una earnestly, "if he would only change his mode of life I'm sure he would get well."

"Yes," the young man answered absently, "of course, exactly," he hesitated a moment, then burst out in despair, "Then I would have to go away."

Una looked at him surprised at his evident emotion.

"Of course we would be very sorry to lose you," she said quietly, "but you, no doubt, would be glad to get back to your home."

"No—I would not," he said passionately, coming a step nearer, "because you would not be there."

"I?"

Una Challoner rose to her feet in amazement at his words.

"I?" she repeated in a puzzled tone. "What have I to do with your movements?"

"Everything," said the unhappy young man, with a gesture of despair. "When I came here a short time since I was perfectly happy—I had conquered all the evils and sorrow of my youth, and my life was a pleasant one, but since I saw you all is changed. I can think of nothing but you—morn, noon, and night, I see you before me—morn, noon, and night, I only hear your voice."

He looked at her defiantly and saw her standing silent and indignant before him.

"Can't you understand?" he burst out again rapidly. "I love you—I love you! from the first moment I saw you I loved you—I want you to be my wife, will you be my wife, Una?"

Miss Challoner felt perplexed—this man had only known her a fortnight, she had spoken very little to him, yet here he was asking her to marry him in a vehement, masterful manner, which roused within her all the pride of womanhood.

"What you ask is impossible, Doctor Nestley," she said, coldly and deliberately. "I have only known you a fortnight and — beyond this I am ignorant of your life in every way. I never dreamed that you would speak to me in this manner."

"Then you don't love me?" he cried in despair. "You cold perfection of womanhood, you don't love me?"

Una would have replied indignantly, but she began to see the nervous, excitable temperament of the young man and recognised that, being under the influence of a strong emotion, he was not answerable for the way in which he spoke.

"No," she replied, gently, "I cannot love you, Doctor Nestley—even if I did, I could hardly respond to your passion after so short an acquaintance; come, doctor, you have been worn out by your nightly attendance on my cousin, you are not well and speak without thinking, forget the words you have spoken and let things be as they were."

It was a gracious thing of her to say, for, in spite of his evident earnestness, she felt indignant at the manner in which he had spoken to her.

"Things can never be as they were," he replied, dully. "I have seen you and that has changed my whole life—is there no chance?"

"There is no chance," she replied, coldly, and turned away to intimate the interview was over. Even as she did so, he sprang forward with a fierce light in his eyes.

"You love another," he hissed out between his clenched teeth.

Una turned on him in a dignified way with her eyes blazing with anger.

"How dare you speak to me in this manner?" she said, wrathfully. "Do not try my patience too far—I have given you an answer to the mad words you spoke—now go."

She pointed to the door with a commanding gesture, and the young man, drooping his head on his breast, moved towards it.

"You don't know what you are doing," he said, in a dreary voice. "You are destroying my life; whatever evils now drag me down, it will be your fault."

"A cowardly speech," she said, in a clear, scornful voice; "because you cannot get the toy you long for you speak like a child. I have nothing to do with your life, if you yield to evil it will be through

your own weak will, not through any fault of mine—not a word," she went on as he was about to speak; "leave me at once and I will try and forget what you have said."

He tried to look her in the face; but seeing her standing tall and straight as a young Greek maiden, with nothing but scorn and condemnation in her eyes, he turned away with a sigh, and letting his head fall on his breast walked slowly out of the room, careless of what happened to him now that he had placed all his chances on the casting of a die—and lost.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE FALL OF MAN.

Who stands so high that he may never fall,
Who lies so low that he may never rise?
The lowliest may one day win life's prize,
The highest thro' temptation lose his all.

Beaumont was a man who neglected no chance, however small, by which he could benefit himself; consequently thinking if he discovered Squire Garsworth's secret it might prove of use to him, he determined to find out all about it. He knew perfectly well that no power of persuasion would lead the madman to divulge his thoughts, so the only chance of discovering anything was to reduce him to a mere automaton, perfectly powerless in his hands. This he hoped to do by means of hypnotism, of which curious process he knew a good deal.

While in Germany, some years before, he had by accident come across Heidenheim's book on animal magnetism, which interested him so much that he pursued the subject. After reading the opinions of Grützner, Berger and Baumler on hypnosis, he turned his attention to French authorities, eagerly following the history of animal magnetism from Mesmer and Puységur downward, and led by such studies to try his hand on subjects, he became quite an adept in this strange psychological science. Taking it up at first merely as an amusement, on going deeper into the subject he soon saw that such hypnotic power would be a terrible weapon in the hands of an unscrupulous man, as, by reducing the hypnotised person to the condition of a mere instrument, it enabled him to do acts through such instrument for which he himself could not be held legally responsible.

In a book on the subject by MM. Demarquay and Giraud-Teulon, entitled "Recherches sur L'Hypnotism," he had come across a case in which a lady in a condition of hypnotic hallucination began to tell aloud secrets which compromised her exceedingly. Taking this case as an illustration of what could be done during hypnosis, Beaumont determined to throw the Squire into a cataleptic trance, and by questions or suggestions lead him to reveal his secret. This being done, he could restore him to his normal condition, absolutely ignorant of his revelation, and he thought if the secret were worth anything he could then do what he pleased.

Having thus definitely settled his plan of action, the next step to take was to guard against the possibility of Nestley surprising him in any of his hypnotic experiments, with which, as medical attendant of the Squire, he would have a perfect right to

interfere. Although Nestley had become much more friendly with Beaumont, he still regarded him with a certain amount of suspicion, so the artist's aim was now to reduce him to the state of subjection in which he had been in London five years before.

He knew Nestley was a very clever man, but remarkably weak, and likely to be led astray. In London, under the influence of drink, he had been a slave to Beaumont, and here in Garsworth the artist determined to reduce him to a similar state of slavery. Never for a moment did he think of the clever brain he would destroy, or the life he would wreck—all he wanted was the assistance of the young doctor in certain plans beneficial to himself, and, at whatever cost, he determined to carry them out. Beaumont, as a matter of fact, had in him a great deal of the Italian Despot nature as described by Machiavelli, and with cold,

relentless subtlety, set himself to work to ruin the unhappy Duncan Nestley body and soul for his own ends.

Nestley was doubtless weak to allow himself to be so dominated, but unhappily it was his nature. If Nature endows a man largely in one way, she generally deprives him of something else in equal proportion, and while Nestley was a brilliant, clever man, who, if left to himself, would have lived an honest and creditable life, yet his morally weak nature placed him at the mercy of any unscrupulous scoundrel who thought fit to play upon his feelings.

Unhappily, circumstances aided Beaumont's nefarious plan, for after leaving Una the young doctor walked across the common to the village, hoping to pull himself together by a brisk walk.

At the bridge he found Beaumont leaning over it, looking at the water swirling below,

and on hearing footsteps, the artist looked up with a gratified smile as he recognised his victim.

"What's the matter, Nestley?" he asked after the first greetings; "You don't look well."

"I'm not well," retorted Nestley abruptly; "I'm nearly worn out by that old man—morn, noon and night I've got to be beside him—if he's paid me handsomely he's taking his full value out of me."

"Yes, I think he is," replied Beaumont deliberately, "you look quite thin—not the man of three weeks ago. He must be a kind of mediæval succubus living on the blood of young men. It would be wise for you to leave him."

Nestley leaned his chin on his folded arms, which were resting on the parapet of the bridge, and sighed deeply.

"No—I can't do that."

"Oh! I understand," said Beaumont with

a sneer, beginning to smoke one of his eternal cigarettes.

"What do you understand?"

"Why you won't leave the Grange."

"There's no difficulty in guessing that," retorted Nestley angrily, "my medical—— What the deuce are you grinning at?"

"You, my friend," said Basil smiling, "your medical—what!—honour—knowledge—interest—what you like."

"Don't talk rubbish."

"As you please."

"Look here," said Nestley, turning round with a resolute frown on his haggard face, "what is the reason I don't leave the Grange?"

"Not being in your confidence I can't say, but if I may guess, I should think Una Challoner."

Nestley made a gesture of assent, and turned once more to gaze moodily at the grey waters of the river.

"If I only had the courage," he muttered harshly, "I would throw myself into the water and end everything."

"More fool you," remarked Beaumont cynically; "'men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love'. Don't give Rosalind's remark the lie."

"I've no doubt she loves someone else," said Nestley bitterly.

"I've no doubt she does," replied Beaumont tranquilly, "but you seem quite worn out between love and sickness, so come with me to the inn and have something to eat."

"I don't mind," said Nestley listlessly, "but I can't eat a thing."

"Don't give way so easily, my dear fellow," said Beaumont scornfully, as they walked along; "be a man, not a baby."

"You're not in love."

"True, oh king; but I've had the disease

badly enough—it's all dead and done with now. I've left Venus for Plutus, and I think Mercury, the god of tricksters, has some of my worship."

Dr. Nestley made no remark, being occupied with his own sad thoughts, so Beaumont said nothing more, and they walked along to the inn silently. On arriving there they went into the parlour, and Nestley took his seat near the window, staring idly out at the dusty road, while Beaumont ordered a slight luncheon, and a bottle of champagne.

Job Kossiter's idea of wine was a very vague one, as he himself habitually drank beer, but in deference to Beaumont's wishes he sent over to Duxby and obtained a few cases of champagne, whose excellence satisfied even the fastidious artist. The table being laid and the luncheon brought in, Beaumont filled two tumblers with champagne, one for himself, and the other

he placed by Nestley's plate. The young doctor, being wrapped up in gloomy thought, did not perceive this, and, when he took his seat at the table, had no idea that the glass at his elbow contained wine instead of water. He tried to eat two or three mouthfuls of food, but not succeeding, took up the glass to drink, and so preoccupied was he that it was not until he had swallowed a mouthful that he perceived what it was. Replacing the glass on the table immediately, he glared angrily at Beaumont, who, feigning not to observe his annoyance, went on eating his luncheon with great enjoyment.

"Why did you give me champagne?" asked Nestley harshly. "You know I only drink water."

"I know you're an idiot," retorted Beaumont coolly, "and don't know what's good for you. In your present state of health a glass of champagne will do you no harm."

"You forget the harm drink has done me already."

"Five years ago," said the artist mockingly. "You've been a teetotaler for five years, so I think you are entitled to a little indulgence now. Go on, drink it up like a man."

"No," replied Nestley resolutely, and he turned his head away. "I will not drink."

"Very well," said Beaumont indifferently. "Please yourself."

His unhappy friend looked again at the amber-coloured wine in the glass, and felt half inclined to yield. After all, he had not touched liquor of any sort for five long years, and did not feel as a rule inclined to take it, but now the nights of watching by the bedside of the old squire had worn him out physically, and the disdain of Una had made him wretched mentally, so he half determined to take this one glass to cheer

him up. His good angel, however, came to his aid at this critical moment, and turning his head away with a shudder, he went on making a pretence of eating. Beaumont who had watched him narrowly all this time, saw the struggle that was going on in the young man's mind, but with true craftiness, pretended to take no notice, satisfied that his victim was gradually being lured into the snare so artfully laid.

"So you love Miss Challoner," he said genially. "Well, I can hardly wonder at that. To tell you the truth, I fell in love with her myself—merely in an artistic sense, I assure you," added the astute artist with a laugh as he saw the anger in Nestley's face. "She has a lovely face which seems to wear the calm of those old Greek statues. I should like to paint her as Artemis—the inviolate Artemis before she loved Endymion — with the serene light of chastity on her face and the sweetness of night

in her eyes. It would be a wonderful picture."

"I wonder you don't ask her to be your model," growled Nestley, sulkily.

"Hardly worth while, for two reasons," replied Beaumont lightly, yet with a suspicion of regret in his tone. "In the first place she would refuse, and in the second, my hand has lost its cunning. One needs to be young and enthusiastic to paint a classical picture. I am of too earthy a nature to have such hopeless visions. Well, are you going to play the part of young Endymion to this moon goddess?"

"No," answered Nestley bitterly, "she won't have anything to do with me."

"Poor Endymion!"

"Don't be a fool, talking such classical stuff! I tell you I'm madly in love with her, and she won't have anything to do with me. Everything is against me. I'm

poor, unloved and obscure. Life isn't worth living under such conditions."

He looked again at the sparkling wine, which seemed to invite him to try it as an anodyne for his pain. Everything seemed to his distorted imagination to be dull and dark. Wine would at least give him a few hours' respite from these torturing thoughts. He was master of himself now. He would drink one glass and no more. After all, seeing that everything was lost, what did it matter if he did fall once more? He had nothing to live for now. A wild despair took possession of his heart, and with a reckless laugh he seized the glass and finished the wine to the last drop.

"*Evohé Bacchus*," said Beaumont, draining his glass. "There's nothing like wine to cure a broken heart."

The insidious wine mounted rapidly to the excitable brain of the young man, and

he no longer felt regret at breaking the pledge he had made five years before. The humdrum past of struggle and respectability was done with. Wine would solace him. Drink! Who cared for such a thing? Anacreon was the head of a glorious band of poets, and praised the wine. Wise Anacreon, he knew the true virtues of the grape. The past is dead, the future is uncertain. Live—live only in the present, with wine to make us as gods—*Evohé Bacchus.*

The stimulating wine had performed its work excellently, and the world hitherto so gloomy now appeared of a roseate tint.

"A broken heart!" he repeated, with a gay laugh. "Pish! hearts don't break so easily. A woman's no means yes. I'll ask again."

"Nothing like perseverence," said Basil, observing with infinite joy the flushed face

and bright eyes of the young man. "Have some more wine?"

"Rather!" replied Nestley, holding out his glass, which Beaumont filled. "I was a fool to give up this for water. I'm sick of total abstainers—thin-blooded croakers. Here's confusion to them!" and he drank off the second glass.

Beaumont now saw that his victim was in that obstinate stage of recklessness which could not brook contradiction, so knew well how to proceed.

"Well, we've finished the bottle," he said brightly. "Suppose we go out for a walk."

"No—no walk," returned Nestley, with an imbecile grin. "You've stood me a bottle. Now it's my turn."

"I don't want any more," said Beaumont indifferently, "and I think you've had enough also."

"I haven't," retorted Nestley defiantly.

"I'm as straight as a die. I suppose you won't drink with me?"

"Oh yes, I will, if you insist upon it."

"I do insist," cried the doctor, bringing his fist down on the table with a bang. "You must drink to show there is no ill-will. We were once friends, Basil."

"And are so still, I trust," said the artist, cordially.

"Your hand," said Nestley, with an outburst of maudlin affection. "Give me your hand."

Beaumont suffered his hand to be shaken violently by the doctor, and then that gentleman, now in a hilarious state of excitement, walked to the bell, ringing it with unnecessary violence.

Margery appeared in answer, and seemed somewhat astonished at Nestley's state, as he had always been so reserved and quiet in his demeanour.

"Another bottle of champagne," said

Nestley in a thick voice, coming close to her. "You are a pretty girl."

He tried to embrace her, but Margery, who was used to seeing the rustics in a similar state, pushed him away with a hearty laugh, and went off to get the wine.

Nestley resumed his seat at the table, talking rapidly to Beaumont about all sorts of things, and then began to boast about himself.

"I can do anything—anything, I tell you," he said, looking at Beaumont, who was smoking. "My brain's worth a dozen of any other fellows'. Don't you believe me?"

"Oh, yes, I believe you," replied Beaumont, as Margery returned with another bottle of champagne; "but, if I were you, I'd take no more wine."

"Won't I!" said Nestley in a defiant manner. "You'll see."

Margery retreated, laughing at the

maudlin condition of the young man, and filling his tumbler up to the brim with wine, he drank it off with an air of drunken bravado. Beaumont, with a sneer on his thin lips, sat calmly watching the grotesque antics of the man he had brought so low, and only took a little of the second bottle. Dr. Nestley sang and laughed and boasted till his legs began to get shaky, and then he sat down and finished the rest of the bottle, thereby reducing himself to a state of hopeless intoxication.

Finally he fell asleep with his head on the table, whereupon Beaumont, not without some difficulty, woke him up and half led, half dragged him to the sofa. With noisy protests that he was all right, the unhappy young man lay down, and in a few moments fell into a drunken slumber, while Beaumont, feeling no compunction at having reduced a human being to the level of a beast, stood over him with a sneer.

"I don't think you'll give me much trouble," he said serenely. "You've started on the downward path once more, and this time I expect you'll never get back again."

He went out, calmly smoking his cigarette, and asked Margery to let no one disturb his friend.

"He's taken more than is good for him," he said apologetically.

"Oh bless you, sir, that's nothing," returned Margery stolidly. "A sleep will put him all right."

"Will it?" said Beaumont to himself when he was standing in the bright sunshine. "A sleep will never put you all right again in this life, Duncan Nestley."

## CHAPTER VI.

### JAM, JAM EFFICACI DO MANUS SCIENTIAE.

I use no charms,
Ephesian letters, philtres, spells or runes,
Nor aught of necromantic devilries
Yet thro' the power of new-found sciences
Before my searching gaze I bare your soul
And read the secret longings writ thereon.

Owing to Nestley's skilful treatment the squire soon recovered from his illness, but the fact of twice being laid upon a bed of sickness within a few weeks, showed how susceptible his constitution had become to the slightest ailment, and how rapidly any such ailment might terminate with fatal results.

To a young and vigorous frame such slight indispositions would be comparatively unimportant, but the weak body of the old man, with its worn-out organiza-

tion, was liable to develop these disorders in a most alarming manner. The flame of life was very feeble, and it was only by the utmost watchfulness that it could be kept alive at all.

In spite of his settled conviction regarding incarnation in a new body, the squire seemed remarkably loth to leave his old one, and obeyed the doctor's orders in a most slavish manner, dreading lest by some chance his soul should slip away into the next world. He had accumulated a large fortune, which according to his delusion he hoped to enjoy when his soul had become incarnate in a new body, so he had no trouble on that score. His great desire was now to get his portrait finished, and to this end, in spite of his ill-health, he insisted upon leaving his bed and sitting to Beaumont according to his regular custom.

Basil having once more brought Nestley

under his dominating will, determined to proceed at once in his hypnotic experiment, and at this final sitting judged it an admirable time to carry out his idea. All he wanted was an opportunity to introduce the subject without rousing the squire's suspicions, and the old man, during their conversation, speedily afforded him an opportunity of doing so.

They were in the drawing-room as usual, and the squire, looking more wrinkled and worn than ever, was seated in his arm-chair, while the artist dexterously put a line here and there on the painted face before him.

"You don't seem well this morning, Mr. Garsworth," said Beaumont, as the old man moved wearily in his chair.

"No, sir, I don't," retorted the squire in his harsh voice. "I don't expect I'll leave my bed again when I once go back to it."

"Oh, things are surely not so bad as that."

"I am afraid they are," replied Garsworth, shaking his head. "I am anxious to go into a new body and leave this worn-out frame with its incessant pain."

"Are you in pain now?" asked Beaumont, sympathetically.

"Yes—I have a bad attack of neuralgia—the east wind always affects me more or less that way."

"I think I could do you some good."

"Nonsense—you're not a doctor?"

"I am not the rose, but I've lived near it, my dear sir," said Beaumont, equably, "and I know something of therapeutics."

"A little knowledge is a dangerous thing," replied the old man sneeringly.

"I can reply with another proverb," said Basil, smiling. "A drowning man will clutch at a straw—so take me as your straw and see what I can do—I cannot

cure you of your neuralgia, but I can give you some relief."

"In what way?"

"By hypnosis."

"Bah!—Mesmer and charlatanism."

"Not at all—I have studied the subject, and I assure you there is more truth in it than you imagine. Mesmer was not altogether a charlatan remember—he was wiser than Cagliostro."

"Well—well—what do you propose to do?"

"Hypnotise you."

"And then?"

"Well—the neuralgia will go away after you've been in the trance some time, then I'll wake you and you can retire."

"But the portrait?"

"It won't affect the portrait in the least—I can go on painting and you will be free from pain."

The squire hated pain, and was moreover

very curious to test Beaumont's knowledge, so he consented to the idea.

"Go on, sir," he said grimly. "I don't object."

Beaumont nodded carelessly, delighted thus to have gained his end, and producing from his pocket a faceted piece of glass, he arose from his seat and walked over to the old man.

Taking up his position at one side of the chair he held the glittering object just above the squire's forehead.

"Look steadily at this," he said in a quiet tone, and on Garsworth doing so he waited silently for the result, which soon took place. The eyes became humid and brilliant, the gaze fixed and the pupils dilated, until the old man fell into a cataleptic state. As the glass facet was still held in front of his eyes he soon passed into a lethargic condition and fell backward in his chair with a sigh.

Beaumont took the glass away with a feeling of relief, as he doubted being able to produce the hypnotic sleep so easily. He had now at his command a will-less automaton who would do whatever he was told. But this was not what Beaumont desired, as he was unable to suggest the secret to the helpless man before him, and without suggestion the automaton would do nothing. He wanted to change this lethargic sleep into a somnambulistic state, so that he could have the memory, the intelligence, and the imagination of the squire at his command. This he achieved by slightly rubbing his hand to and fro for a few minutes across the top of the head, and in obedience to the feeling produced by this, Garsworth rapidly passed into a state of active somnambulism.

He arose from his chair, looked quickly from right to left, while Beaumont spoke to him, and during the conversation that

followed, was in a state of perpetual movement. All that Beaumont had now to do was to suggest things to the somnambulist which would engender trains of thought, and these trains of thought would be speedily acted upon by volition.

The tall figure in black swayed rapidly to and fro while Beaumont spoke in a clear, deliberate manner, suggesting the questions he wanted to be answered.

"You have a secret?"

"I have a secret," assented the somnambulist, in the same slow manner.

"You have arranged a certain affair so that you will be able to enjoy your present fortune during your next incarnation?"

"Yes."

"You think you have arranged everything necessary to carry out this idea?"

"I think so."

"State to yourself the whole scheme, so

that you can see you have forgotten nothing."

Garsworth remained silent for a moment, then began to talk rapidly.

"I have arranged everything in a proper manner. I am sure I have forgotten nothing. My will has been made some years, and in it I have left all my property to my natural son. Such natural son does not exist—at present he is a fictitious person. When I am reincarnated he will become a reality. I will be my own natural son, and the property will pass to myself in the new body by the action of my will in this present body. It will be necessary for me in my new form to prove myself the person mentioned in the will. I do this in such new body by producing a certain paper and my seal ring, which I have safely hidden away. Retaining my memory during my next incarnation, I go to the hiding-place, find the paper and

the ring, produce them to the lawyer who holds my will, and having proved my identity as natural son, can become possessed of the property. Yes, everything is all right."

He ceased speaking, and Beaumont, having listened attentively, was much struck with the ingenuity of the idea expressed in the delusion This, then, was the way in which he hoped to carry out his scheme. Was ever madman so whimsical? The artist did not see much chance of benefiting by the discovery so far, still, if he saw the papers mentioned by the squire, there might be something in them which would prove useful. Yes; he would get the squire to show him the hiding-place of the papers.

"Your scheme is perfect," he said slowly, "but some one may find the hiding-place and steal the paper."

"No, no," replied the somnambulist, in

an exulting tone. "No chance of that. I've hidden it too well."

"Go and see if it is safe."

"Safe! safe! is that paper safe?" muttered the old man, with a frown. "I must see. I must see. But how can I go? I am too weak."

Beaumont instantly exerted his power by suggestion.

"You are very strong. Go at once and examine the paper."

Ordinarily the squire used a crutch to walk with, but on hearing the remark about his strength from his hypnotiser, he at once became imbued with the hallucination that he was physically a vigorous man, and walked towards the door of the drawing-room with rapid, springy steps, followed by Beaumont.

The somnambulist led the way up the stairs, paused for a moment on the first landing, then, turning round, walked

towards the front of the house on the first floor. At this moment Patience Allerby came out of one of the rooms, and seeing the squire walking in such a rapid manner, and Beaumont following, looked at them both in alarm.

"Where are you going, sir?" she cried, as Garsworth brushed past her, and, putting out her hand, tried to grasp him. The slight touch she gave him appeared to cause the somnambulist suffering, and break the hypnotic spell, for he paused at once. Alarmed lest the old man should awake, Beaumont grasped Patience by the wrist, and dragged her back quickly.

"You are going for your papers," he said to Garsworth.

"I am going for my papers," repeated the squire slowly, and then, in obedience to the impulse engendered, went on again. Patience would have spoken, but a devilish

look on Beaumont's face seemed to freeze her blood.

"Be silent," he said in a harsh whisper, shaking her wrist. "I will tell you all soon, but now be silent for your son's sake."

She wrenched herself free and shrank back into the shadow with a cry, while Beaumont, taking no further notice, quickly followed the squire, who was now some distance ahead.

Garsworth opened a large folding-door that stood a short distance away from the stairs, and which led into the ball-room of the Grange. Followed by the artist, he went into the long, bare room, which stretched nearly the whole length of the front wing of the house, being lighted by eight large windows, looking out on to the park.

The room was chill and bleak, every footfall awaking a responsive echo, and

leaving a mark on the grey dust that had accumulated on the floor for many years. The wall opposite the door was adorned with delicately-painted panels, representing the nine muses, each female figure being twice life-size, and rising from the floor to the arched roof, between each of the eight windows. At one end of the room the panels represented the three Graces, at the other the three Fates, while the remaining wall displayed nine goddesses of heathen mythology. The arched roof was painted a deep blue, silvered with stars, but nowhere appeared any male form—nothing but the gracious female figures of Hellas were to be seen around.

The squire went straight to the extreme corner of the room, on the left-hand side of the door, and knelt down where there was a panel representing Clotho spinning the thread of life. He evidently touched a spring concealed in the gold-embossed

frame of the panel, for it silently slid back, displaying a wall of rough stone. The upper blocks of stone appeared heavy and cumbersome, but the lower ones were much smaller, and as Beaumont looked he saw Garsworth drag from its place a smallish stone in the lower centre of the wall, displaying only the rough place where it lay, but no cavity where anything could be hid. The squire, however, soon showed how ingenious was the hiding-place he had chosen, for on turning round the stone which he had removed, there appeared a small hole hollowed out, and from this the old man took a paper and a ring. He laid them down for a moment to lift the stone off his lap, but at this moment Beaumont exerting his hypnotic power, said abruptly :

"You are looking at the paper."

Under the influence of the hallucination produced, the squire looked earnestly at the stone on his lap, while Beaumont, pick-

ing up the real paper, glanced over it rapidly, examined the ring, then laid them both down again by the somnambulist.

"You should put them back," he suggested distinctly. Garsworth picked up the paper, and replacing it in the stone, put it once more in its former position, and then dragged the panel along till it clicked on the spring, thus resuming its former appearance. No one, to look at it, would think that such a large picture could be moved in any way, and even if the secret of the panel were discovered, Beaumont felt sure no one would think of examining the interior of the stone in the wall. Having now ascertained all he wanted to know, Beaumont's next care was to get the squire back to his former position and wake him, so that he would be unconscious of what he had done during his hypnotic sleep. To this end he bent forward to the kneeling figure on the floor.

"Mr. Beaumont is waiting to finish your picture."

"Yes, yes. I must have the picture done," said Garsworth, and, rising to his feet, he left the room, followed by Beaumont, who saw the white face of Patience peering from the shadow, and frowning menacingly at him.

Placing his finger on his lips to enforce silence, he glided past her down the wide stairs, across the hall and into the drawing room, where he found the squire had once more re-established himself in his chair.

"Well," said Beaumont to himself, "there seems to be some chance of making use of this secret, but I can't do it without the help of Patience, so I must see her. Meanwhile, I'll wake the squire."

He crossed over to the squire and touched his face with his own cold

hands, upon which the old man started violently.

He then spoke loudly into his ear:

"Mr. Garsworth!"

The somnambulist opened his eyes, and a confused expression appeared on his face as he looked at Beaumont.

"Do you feel better?" asked the artist, gently.

"Yes," answered the squire, slowly passing his hand over his forehead. "The pain is gone, but I feel very tired."

"It's always the case in hypnotism."

"How long have I been asleep?"

"About a quarter-of-an-hour," replied Beaumont, glancing at his watch. "Were you dreaming at all? Hypnotism usually produces dreams."

"Aha!" said Garsworth, cunningly, "I was dreaming of my secret. I did not speak in my sleep, did I?" he asked, in sudden terror.

"No, you were perfectly quiet," answered the artist, going back to his seat.

"I feel too tired to sit any more," observed Garsworth, rising with a great effort. "I must lie down. Hypnotism seems to exhaust the body very much."

"It does, of course; it acts physically."

The squire, with the aid of his stick, moved painfully to the door, leaving Beaumont smiling at the picture before him.

## CHAPTER VII.

### WHEN IN DOUBT, PLAY TRUMPS.

Life is a game
The keenest wins.
Repute or shame,
Life is a game;
We give or claim
For virtues, sins;
Life is a game
The keenest wins.

BEAUMONT was perfectly satisfied with the result of his experiment, as he had discovered the squire's secret, and had yet succeeded in keeping him in ignorance of his having done so. With the keen intellect of a man accustomed to live by his wits, he had, during his rapid survey of the papers, seen the chances of turning the secret to his own advantage. But to do so he required the co-operation of

Patience, and this he was doubtful of obtaining.

She held studiously aloof from him, and since the interview in the churchyard had given no sign that she was aware of his existence. Many men would have been discouraged by this contemptuous silence; but not so Beaumont, who never saw discourtesy in anyone of whom he wanted to make use. Hitherto Patience had been a mere cipher in his eyes; but now, since his discovery of the existence of her son, and since he had learned the jealously-guarded secret of the squire, she suddenly became an important person; for it was through her he hoped to secure his ends—ends calculated to benefit himself alone.

The only way by which he could hope to gain her ear was through her love for their son, hence his explanation on the stairs. Now, after putting away his

painting utensils, he lighted a cigarette, and strolled easily along to the housekeeper's room in order to arrange matters with her. Of the result he had no fear, as he intended to appeal to her motherhood, which appeal, he well knew, would not be neglected by this woman, whose whole life was devoted to her son. Mr. Beaumont was an expert whist-player, and, moreover, admired the game very much. So, in this case, being somewhat doubtful of Patience, yet holding a strong hand, he took an illustration from his favourite game, and said:

"When in doubt, play trumps."

"It will be a charming game," he murmured, as he knocked at the door of the housekeeper's room, "she is no mean adversary, and hates me like poison—all the more credit to me if I win—as I mean to."

Patience Allerby, in her quiet, grey

dress, was sitting silent and statuesque by the window, staring out at the rapidly darkening landscape. When Beaumont entered, she looked coldly at him, but neither rose to receive him nor invited him to sit down. Her visitor, however, was not troubled by any sensitive feeling, so threw himself into a comfortable chair that was near the fire, and coolly went on smoking.

"I hope you don't mind my cigarette," he said, languidly, "but I can't exist without smoking."

"You can't exist without all sorts of luxuries," replied Patience, bitterly, "you're not the man to deny yourself anything."

"I had to deny myself a good many things when we were starving in London," said Mr. Beaumont, leisurely. "By the way, I want to speak to you about London."

"And I want to speak to you about the squire," she retorted, quickly. "What were you doing following him upstairs?"

"Don't distress yourself, my good soul," said the artist, in a coolly aggravating manner. "I'll tell you that later on; meantime, we will talk of Chelsea."

"No."

"Pardon me—yes. Do you remember how we lived there, you and I, and the visions we used to indulge in? I haven't forgotten it, I assure you, and then Fanny Blake—poor Fanny! she is dead now. I see you gave the boy her surname."

"And what if I did? she flashed out fiercely, with a deep frown on her face. "Could I give him yours—the father who had deserted him? Could I give him mine—the mother to whom his birth was a disgrace?"

"A disgrace! I thought you loved him?"

"So I do—I love him more than my life; but his birth was a disgrace, and I wish to keep the knowledge from him, please God."

"Was the boy you call Reginald Blake ever christened?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I could not tell the truth about his birth, and I refused to tell a lie. He was neither christened, nor was his birth registered."

"Then he has no right to the name he bears."

"I know that. Whose fault is it, Basil Beaumont—yours or mine? Why didn't you make an honest woman of me?"

"Because I did not choose to," he replied, coolly; "by the way, has our son been confirmed?"

"No."

"Oh," he said, sneering, "I'm sorry he's not got some religious flavour about him. I wonder, Patience, when you called him Blake, you did not pass him off as Fanny's son."

She arose from her seat in a fury.

"Do you think I was going to place my sin on Fanny's shoulders?"

"I don't see why not—Fanny and yourself both came up to London at the same time—the child was born six months after you arrived there—why not call it Fanny's child?"

"There was no reason."

"Not then; but there is now, and a very excellent reason—ten thousand a year."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this, that Reginald Blake, from this time forward, is the son of Fanny Blake and Randal Garsworth."

Patience looked at him in surprise, and involuntarily drew back a step, thinking him mad. Beaumont saw this, and laughed mockingly.

"Don't be afraid—there's method in my madness."

"There's some villainy in it," she said, with a hard smile, sitting down near him; "tell me what you mean, Basil Beaumont, if you intend touching a hair of my son's head I'll punish you."

"I intend to give him ten thousand a year, if you won't be a fool."

She smiled coldly, and folded her hands upon her lap.

"I'm no fool, but I know you—go on, Ananias."

Beaumont flung the burnt-out cigarette into the fire with an irritable gesture, and turned his face towards the frigid woman seated before him.

"Listen to what I've got to say," he said slowly, "and then you can do as you please—if you assist me it means money and happiness for our son; if you don't, I'll tell him everything, and then leave the village for ever."

Patience shivered slightly under the steely glitter of his eyes, and then resumed her old impassive manner.

"Brag's a good dog," she said mockingly, "but he does not bite—go on, I'm all attention."

The artist glanced at the door to make sure that it was closed, then drawing his chair closer to that of Patience Allerby, began to talk rapidly, in a low tone of voice.

"Of course you know the squire is mad—quite mad—he has an idea that his soul will be re-incarnated in another body, and as he is afraid he may be born poor, he has invented a silly

scheme by which to become repossessed of his present wealth. I have discovered this scheme—how it does not matter—all I need tell you is, that I have found out all about it—his idea is to pass himself off as his own son."

"But he has no son."

"Of course not, you fool," said Beaumont impatiently, "he couldn't carry out his idea if he had; it's this way, he has made his will, leaving the property to his natural son, who will at some future time—date not fixed, as he cannot tell when he'll be re-incarnated—go to the lawyers who hold the will and produce, as a proof of his claim to the estate, a letter written to him by his supposed father, also the squire's seal ring, when he does so, under the terms of the will, he inherits the Garsworth estate."

"I understand, so far; but how does

the squire, in a new body, expect to get these papers?"

"Oh! he thinks he'll remember about the affair when he is born again, so he has hidden the papers where he'll be able to find them—in his new body he'll simply go and look them up, produce them to the lawyers, and there you are."

"What a foolish idea."

"What a foolish remark, you mean," said Beaumont; "of course it's foolish, the man is mad. When he dies the papers will remain undisturbed till doomsday—if I choose."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this—as he does not know when or where he'll be re-incarnated, he has left a number of blanks in the letter."

"Have you seen the letter?"

"Of course I have. I know where the paper is hidden—didn't I tell you

I'd discovered his secret. Well, all I have to do is to fill up these blanks—the name of the mother, the place of the supposed son's birth, and all the rest of it."

"I see. But what have I to do with this?"

Beaumont arose to his feet and walked angrily to and fro.

"What an idiot you are, Patience," he said irritably. "Can't you see? I'm going to fill up the mother's name as Fanny Blake, and the son's as Reginald."

"Our son?"

"Precisely. Now do you see why I want your help?"

"I do, but you shan't have it."

"Indeed; why not?"

"I'm not going to have such a sin on my conscience."

"There's no sin, you Puritan," he said

quickly, "the re-incarnation idea is rubbish; no one will appear to claim the property, so why not give the ten thousand a year to Reginald?"

"It would dispossess Miss Una."

"It would do nothing of the sort—under the will Miss Una cannot claim—the lawyers don't know anything about the re-incarnation theory; all they know is that Squire Garsworth has a son who will appear and prove his claim by the possession of certain papers and a seal ring—until that son appears no one can claim the estate."

"Miss Una could dispute the will on the ground of madness."

"I daresay she could, but she won't—if Reginald becomes master of Garsworth Grange she will marry him, and will enjoy the property just the same as if she were sole heiress—on the other hand, if he does not become master she'll have

to wait till this non-existent son appears or upset the will, one of which things will be impossible and the other troublesome."

Patience thought for a moment or two and then looked up.

"How do you know Reginald will marry Una?"

"Because I've got eyes in my head. The boy is madly in love with her. I'm sure you must see that your helping me to place Reginald in possession of this property will hurt no one, and be for the benefit of both Una and your own son."

"I see that, but I fail to see what benefit you obtain from it, and I don't think you're the man to work for nothing."

"You're perfectly right," he replied calmly, "but I'm going to make myself Reginald's right hand, and when he comes

in for the property I can help him to look after the estate."

"And ruin him."

"I won't ruin him. Why should I want to ruin my own son?"

"Bah! don't talk like that to me."

"Oh well, if you disbelieve in interest. I'll put it another way. Why should I kill the goose with the golden eggs?"

"Yes, that's more like it," she said with a sneer, "I think your plan is an admirable one, but there's one obstacle."

"What is it?"

"Reginald is an honourable man, and won't accept any property gained by fraud."

Beaumont sighed in a resigned manner, apparently hopeless of explaining matters clearly to this painfully obstinate woman.

"He'll never know the property is

obtained by fraud, because you will tell him he is the son of Fanny Blake and the squire; he will believe you, and regard himself as the lawful heir."

"Still, he thinks he's been born in lawful wedlock, and to undeceive him——"

"Gives him ten thousand a year," interrupted Beaumont coolly. "Well, what do you say, will you help me?"

"I'll tell you to-morrow."

"Why not to-day?"

"Because I don't trust you, I want to go over the affair in my own mind."

Beaumont shrugged his shoulders, put on his hat and lighted another cigarette.

"Just as you please," he said, pausing a moment at the door. "I'll call and see you to-morrow; but if you don't help me in this, I'll do what I say and tell Reginald everything."

When he was gone Patience sat for a long time looking into the fire, evidently

pondering deeply. At length she sighed and muttered:

"I don't know what to do, I must ask counsel of the Lord."

She arose, and having lighted a candle opened the Bible.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

Man is but a whimsical animal at best, for there is no life but what may some day act in discord with its theory.

Patience Allerby occupied a very peculiar position, and knew that she did so, much to her perplexity. Ever since her lapse from virtue she had lived a self-denying existence as an expiation for her sin, and she had cause to be satisfied with the past twenty years of her life, seeing that she had done nothing wrong all the time. True, living an almost monastic existence, she had no temptations to fight against, and the absence of temptation rendered it comparatively easy to lead a virtuous life. Not being tempted she lived an ascetic life, being absolutely certain that she was

strong enough to withstand any temptation, however powerful. Vain hope, for now the devil in the person of her old betrayer assaulted her on her weakest side. Had he tried to make her rob her master or return to her old life of sin, he would have failed dismally, but an appeal through her motherhood was perilous to her strength, and Beaumont knew this when he used her love for Reginald as a weapon against her. In spite of her prayers, her tears, her comforting texts, she knew that if Beaumont wished her to commit any crime to benefit her son she would do so in defiance of her religious belief, however strong.

God alone knew the night of anguish this woman passed, wrestling with the subtle temptation placed before her in such an attractive shape. Those old saints, who, according to pious legends, fought with the visible powers of evil, had no such terrible enemies to cope with, in contrast to a soul

racked with doubt fighting against spiritual promptings.

In vain this poor soul, who wished to do right, closed her ears to the infernal whisperings of evil spirits, in vain she read with frenzied ardour the terrible prophecies of Isaiah or the comforting promises of the Gospels, in vain she knelt weeping bitterly before the crucifix, praying to be guarded from falling into sin. It was all useless. Either spiritual weapons had lost their efficacy, or her intense maternal passion blunted her sense of religious duty, and after a terrible struggle with her invisible enemies, which left her completely prostrate, she began to calmly consider Beaumont's scheme. From that moment she was lost; for, on reviewing the whole matter, she began to pacify her conscience with arguments concerning the rectitude of the affair.

She would be doing no wrong to anyone

—nay, she would be conferring a benefit on Una, seeing that by her marriage with Reginald she would be put in possession of the property at once, whereas should the will be carried out strictly she would have to wait everlastingly for the appearance of a non-existing person. Suppose she agreed to Beaumont's plan, and said Fanny Blake and the squire were the parents of her son, he would become rich and honoured, bearing a renowned name, and no longer be an unknown waif, heavily handicapped in the battle of life.

On the other hand he would learn the shame of his birth, and that would cast an everlasting shadow on his young spirit. What wealth—what position could compensate in his own eyes for the moral stigma thus cast upon him. He might succeed to the property, marry Una, and thus do no harm to anyone; still, if he became a father, how deeply would he feel

for the sins of his parents being visited on his offspring. No, she could not place him in such a position; better for him to remain unknown and obscure, with a full belief in his honourable birth, than go through life haunted by the spectre of an intolerable disgrace.

While thus hesitating between these two views of the case, a sudden idea came to her, which inclined her to refuse to help Beaumont and let the boy make his own life, ignorant of the stain on his name. The squire, in spite of his miserly habits, had a kind heart. She would ask him to give Reginald fifty or a hundred pounds to help him, then the lad could go to London and make a position by his vocal talents. Thus he would benefit in no way through money unjustly obtained, and Una, being in possession of the property, he could marry her and enjoy it just the same as if the scheme were carried out. Yes, it

would be the best way; he would at least never know who or what he was, and she would thus assist him in life without committing a crime. The more she thought of the plan the better she liked it, and falling on her knees in the dark she thanked God long and fervently for the solution He had shown her of the difficulty.

Next morning she proceeded to carry her ideas into effect, for after Miss Cassy and Una had paid their usual morning visit, she found herself alone with the squire and in a position to make her request.

Garsworth was lying in bed, propped up by pillows, and looked very feeble indeed, so that Patience saw the end could not be far off, in spite of Nestley's care and attention.

After his recovery from his debauch, Nestley had felt bitter shame at his fall, but having lost his self-respect by thus reverting to his old ways, he tried to drown

remorse by drinking, and the alcohol was rapidly regaining all its old influence over him. Still he did not let it interfere with his attendance on the Squire, and if the old man saw that Nestley's hand was shaky, and his eyes becoming bleared, he said nothing, and the unhappy young man performed his duties in a mechanical way, drinking deeply whenever an opportunity offered.

Nestley, looking haggard and unsteady after his drinking of the previous night, had just left the room, leaving Patience alone with the Squire, when the old man spoke sharply:

"Patience, what is the matter with the doctor?"

"Drink!" she answered laconically.

"Drink!" repeated the Squire, raising himself on his elbow. "Nonsense, woman, you must be mistaken, he drinks neither wine nor spirits."

"He never did until a week ago," answered Patience coolly, "he used to be a total abstainer, but now—well, you can see for yourself."

The long connection that had existed between this strange couple as master and servant, had developed between them a certain amount of familiarity.

"I remember," said Garsworth musingly, "that in my last incarnation, I drank ale very much—it was in the reign of Elizabeth, and we drank confusion to the King of Spain—it resulted in confusion to myself. If I had not been a drunkard, I would not have been a pauper; it's a pity this young man should follow the same downward path."

"It's his own fault," replied Patience in a stony manner, "he ought to stop when he finds it does him harm."

"No doubt," returned the old man acidly, "but did you ever know a man

deny himself anything if it did him harm?"

"You did so."

"Yes, because I had an object to gain. The life I led in Town was very pleasant, but it would have left me a pauper for my next incarnation."

It was of no use trying to argue the old man out of his delusion, so Patience said nothing, but stood beside him in grim silence with folded arms.

"I'll enjoy myself when I'm born again," pursued Garsworth exultingly. "I will have plenty of money and a new body. I will have youth once again. Oh, youth! youth! how short are your golden hours. Young men never know the treasure they possess in youth, and waste it in idleness and folly; there's that child you brought up, Reginald Blake——"

"I did not bring him up."

"Well, well," rejoined Garsworth testily.

"You know what I mean, you were his nurse—but he has youth, good looks, health and talents—why doesn't he go to London with such advantages, instead of wasting his life in a dull village?"

"He's got no money," retorted Patience icily; "all you mention go for nothing without money."

"No doubt, no doubt," muttered Garsworth, his eyes gleaming; "money is a necessity—still he has talents, I hear."

"What can talents do?"

"Everything; a clever brain commands the world."

"I dare say," retorted Patience ironically, "if it has money to give it a start. Master Reginald has it in him to make a great name by his voice, but he needs help—the help of money—who will give him that help?"

She eyed the old man keenly as she spoke.

"Ah, who indeed?" he replied carelessly, "who indeed?"

"Why not yourself?" said the housekeeper eagerly.

"I?" he ejaculated in surprise.

"Yes, you," she retorted vehemently. "I was as you say the nurse of that boy. I have loved him far more than his dead parents ever did; they left him to me, and I stood in his mother's place: it is my dearest wish that he should succeed—with money he can do so. I have served you long and faithfully and asked no favour, but now that you have mentioned his name, I ask this first and last favour of you, give him money and help him to succeed."

"Do you think I'm mad?" cried the old man shrilly. "Why should I help him? What it he to me? I have gathered all my wealth by years of self-denial. I want to enjoy it in my next existence,

not squander it in this by helping a pauper."

"And yet you talk of the golden hours of youth," she replied bitterly. "It's easy saying, but hard doing. What is a hundred pounds to you?—a drop in the ocean. What is it to him?—everything."

"I can't part with my money," he said doggedly, turning his face away.

Her voice took a tender tone as she pleaded for her son.

"He has no claim upon you, I know, but think of his youth, his talents, wasted in this dull village. You say you will remember in your next body what you have done in this; for years you have never done a kind action to a human being, do one now by helping this lad, and your next existence will be none the worse for having helped an unknown man."

The old man made no reply, but was clearly moved by her argument.

"And again," said Patience, still in the same anxious voice, "with your help he will make a position in the world. What position will you occupy? with all your money, you may be born a prince or a ploughboy—you do not know—but in whatever station you are born, his influence, his friendship, may be a help to you, and it will be all the more precious when you know it is your work."

The woman's voice died away in a soft manner, and she anxiously watched the old man's wrinkled face to see if he would do what she asked. Evidently her words appealed either to his selfishness or good nature, for, turning towards her, a smile spread over his crabbed face.

"I'll do it, Patience," he said quickly. "I'll do it—perhaps he will be of help to me in my next life—get me my cheque book, and I'll write a cheque for fifty

pounds—no more—no more. I can't afford it."

"Fifty is no use—say one hundred," she urged eagerly.

"Well, well! one hundred," he said peevishly, "it's a large sum, still it may do good to me. I'll write a letter with it, and tell him he must do what I ask in my next life. Will he do that?"

"Yes! Yes!" she replied impatiently, nowise affronted by his selfish motives. "He is not the man to forget a kind action."

"You don't thank me," he said angrily, as she went over to the escritoire and got his cheque book. "Grasping! ungrateful!"

"I'm not ungrateful," she retorted, bringing the pen and ink to him with the cheque book, and a block of blotting paper to write on, "but I do thank you. I was never one for many words."

"Bah! women are all alike," he said viciously, sitting up in bed, and seizing the pen. "Go and bring me some letter paper and an envelope."

She did so, and returned to his bedside by the time he had written the cheque.

"I've post-dated this cheque," he said cunningly, "because I won't send it to him till just before I die."

"What do you mean by post-dated?"

"This is the twelfth," he replied, smoothing out the letter paper, "I have dated it the thirtieth."

"How do you know you'll die then?"

"I don't know if I will, you fool," he retorted, angrily, "but I think so—if I don't I'll write another cheque."

"Yes, and change your mind."

"No—no—a promise is a promise; if he helps me in the future I'll help him now. Be quiet, you cat, I want to write."

She remained silent, and very slowly and painfully the old man wrote a letter; then he directed the envelope to Reginald Blake at the Vicarage, and placed the letter and cheque therein. After doing this he closed the letter and told her to bring sealing-wax and his seal.

"What for?" she asked, going over to his desk.

"Because I'm not going to let anyone but himself see what I've written. You needn't be afraid—I will do what I say. Look at the cheque, you fool."

She had brought a candle to the bedside so that he could melt the wax for the seal, and as he held the cheque out to her she read it in the dim light.

"It's all right," she said, with a sigh of relief. "I thank you very much."

"You needn't," he retorted, cynically, sealing the letter with the Garsworth arms. "I do it for my own sake, not his. Now

put this letter in the desk, and let me see you do it."

He handed her his keys; so, taking them and the letter over to the desk, she deposited it in the place indicated by his lean, outstretched finger, and having locked it safely up, blew out the candle and brought the keys back to him.

The Squire placed them under his pillow, then lay down again with a sigh of exhaustion.

"There, I've done what you asked," he said in a dull voice; "now go away. I'll sleep a little."

Patience carefully tucked all the clothes round him, and then left the room with a look of triumph on her face.

"Now, Basil Beaumont," she said, when she was outside the door, "I think I can laugh at you and your threats about my son."

## CHAPTER IX.

### PHANTASMAGORIA.

> Shadows of what are shadows—living once,
> Now naught but ghosts among a world of ghosts,
> Who knows—we may but shadows be on earth
> And act the other life's realities.

Miss Cassy was greatly excited over the afternoon tea to which she had bidden Mrs. Larcher and the rest of the vicarage inmates. It was a long time since she had taken part in a little social festivity such as she had been accustomed to in London, so both herself and Una determined it should be a success. In the dreary, dismal life they led this was a little mild excitement, consequently it was to them as great an event as the ball of the season to a town belle.

Reginald and Pumpkin walked over to

the Grange, but Mrs. Larcher was driven over in state by Dick Pemberton, who drove at such a speed that he nearly rattled the vicar's wife into hysterics. Consequently, on arriving at her destination, Mrs Larcher was severely under the sway of "The Affliction," and had to be at once comforted with strong tea. Cecilia had also been invited, and arrived at the Grange under the guardianship of Miss Busky, who bounced the blind girl so rapidly along the road that she entered the Park in a state of exhaustion.

The party all assembled in Una's private room, where they were shortly afterwards joined by bluff Dr. Larcher and Beaumont. Jellicks, having wriggled in with the tea-cake and muffins, was dismissed altogether, as Mrs. Larcher, under the influence of "The Affliction," declared the old woman made her feel creepy.

"She's so twisty, my dear," she ob-

served to Una; "like a sea-serpent, you know. Even the vicar has noticed her."

"*Qui siccis oculis monstra natantia*," roared the vicar, quoting from his favourite poet; "though, to be sure, I speak of her in the singular."

"Of course," said Dick, slyly, "she's singular in any case."

"So very odd," giggled Miss Cassy, who was making the tea. "I don't mean Jellicks, but what you say — puns, you know, like what's his name—Byron—had in his burlesques—not the Don Juan one, you know, but the other — so odd, wasn't he?"

"Not half so odd as Miss Cassy," whispered Dick to Reginald, but the latter young gentleman, being engaged with Una, did not reply.

"I don't know if I ought to eat muffins," said Mrs. Larcher, darkly, as Miss Busky

bounced up to her with a plate of those edibles. "So very buttery — make me bilious. I've been bilious often, have I not, Eleanora Gwendoline?"

"Yes, often, Mamma," assented the obedient Pumpkin.

"I hope you're better now?" observed Beaumont, politely, seeing the lady's eyes fixed upon him.

"Ah, yes, now," sighed Mrs. Larcher, stirring her tea, "but will it last? The question is—will it endure? My affliction is so capricious. I'm very weak—quite a Hindoo."

"Why a Hindoo, my dear?" asked the vicar, rather puzzled.

"Because they are weak—die if you look at them," explained Mrs. Larcher. "Rice, of course—they live on it, and there's no nourishment in it."

"By the way, Miss Challoner, how is the Squire?" asked Beaumont, who was

leaning up against the mantelpiece looking rather bored.

"He's not at all strong," replied Miss Cassy, taking the remark to herself. "Quite like a candle, you know—so odd—might go out at any moment; but Dr. Nestley is doing him good. But I don't think the dear doctor is well himself."

Beaumont smiled slightly at this, guessing the cause of the doctor's illness, and glancing at Cecilia, saw the blind girl was trembling violently.

"I hope he is not very ill," she said, in her low, clear voice.

"Oh no—he'll be all right soon. I think it's overwork," said Una, hastily, anxious to avoid any discussion of the doctor's complaint, the cause of which she, with her feminine shrewdness, half guessed. "Cecilia, will you play something?"

The blind girl assented, and was led by Una to the quaint old spinet which stood

in the corner. With the true feelings of an artist, Cecilia did not play anything noisy on the delicate instrument, but a dainty old gavotte, which sounded faint and clear, like the sound of a silver bell. All the company were charmed with the delicacy of the music except Miss Cassy and Mrs. Larcher who were conversing about dress.

"I hope you like mine," observed Miss Cassy, looking at the gown she wore, which was of white muslin dotted with pink bows. "I was afraid I'd make it dabby—I'm afraid I have made it dabby. Do you think so?"

Mrs. Larcher eyed the production of Miss Cassy's artistic nature with a critical eye, and pronounced her opinion that it was dabby, thus reducing poor Miss Cassy to the verge of tears. When Cecilia finished the gavotte all present urged her to play something else.

"It's like fairy music," said Beaumont. "I love to hear those old airs of Purcell and Arne played upon such an instrument. It's so thoroughly in keeping with the idea. The lyrics in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' set to the old-fashioned music and played on a spinet, gives one a delightful idea of the court of Oberon and Titania."

"And Miss Mosser plays so charmingly," said Reginald, gaily.

"'O testudinis aureæ
Dulcem quæ strepitum Pieri temperas.'"

quoted the vicar, in his rolling bass.

"I prefer the sweet harmony of the spinet to the lyre," said Beaumont, smiling.

"Dear me, vicar," observed Mrs. Larcher angrily. "I wish you wouldn't be always talking Latin. No one understands it."

"That's hardly a compliment to the gentlemen present, my dear," said Dr. Larcher, in his most stately manner, "but,

as Horace says, 'Oh, mater pulchra'—— I beg your pardon, I will refrain from the bard."

"Now, Mr. Blake, I want you to sing something," said Una, crossing over to Pumpkin.

"Certainly—some old English melody, I suppose, to match the spinet. 'Phyllida flouts me,' or 'Mistress mine, where are you roaming?'"

"Let us have them both," said Beaumont, lazily. "Very likely the ghosts of the old Elizabethan lyrists will come and listen."

"You'll see a real ghost shortly," said Una, mysteriously, as she and Pumpkin, after a whispered consultation, moved to the door.

"The ghost of whom?" asked Reginald, who was standing by the spinet.

"Lady Betty Modish or Sophia Western —which ever you like—town or country,"

replied Una, laughing, and thereupon vanished with Miss Larcher.

"What does she mean?" demanded the vicar, in astonishment.

"Something very odd," said Miss Cassy, shaking her girlish head. "Yes, quite like a play. The School for what's-its-name. Sheridan, you know — quite lovely."

And now Reginald began to sing the quaint old song, "Phyllida flouts me," while Cecilia, who knew the music off by heart, played the accompaniment. The night was beginning to close in, and the room was full of shadows, lighted in a fantastic manner by the red glare of the fire, which flashed on the tarnished gilded frames of the pictures and the sombre faces looking from the walls. Beaumont, leaning his elbow on the mantelpiece, listened quietly, while opposite to him the vicar, ensconced in a great arm-chair, crossed his

legs and kept time to the music with his spectacles.

So gay and charming the old song sounded. Nothing of the sickly sentimentality of the modern drawing-room ballad —nothing of the florid passion of the Italian school—but all fresh and wholesome, like a gentle wind blowing freely over an English meadow, white with daisies. Reginald sang the complaint of the unhappy lover charmingly, and ended amid a subdued murmur of satisfaction, even Mrs. Larcher being pleased.

"So simple," she said, nodding her head. "Quite soothing, like a cradle. Ah, there are no songs now-a-days like the old ones."

"My dear, we are past the age of Corydon and Chloe," replied the vicar. "Virgil and Horace would find no Arcady to sing about now."

"Well, I don't suppose that Imperial Rome was more Arcadian than London,"

said Beaumont, lazily, "but I'm afraid we've lost the charm of simplicity."

"Ah, you've never heard 'Lady Bell,'" said Dick, wisely.

"No. I must confess my ignorance," replied the artist. "Who or what is Lady Bell?"

"It's a song—simplicity, if you like. Reggy found it among some old music at the vicarage."

"Did he, indeed?" observed the vicar, placidly. "No doubt it belonged to my grandfather. I thought that music was all burnt. *Damnosa quid non imminuit dies?*"

"He spared this, sir, at all events," said Reginald, gaily. "Miss Mosser, you can play 'Lady Bell?'"

"Yes, I think so," replied Cecilia, striking a chord. "It haunted me when I first heard it. Sing it now, Mr. Blake."

Whereupon she played a prelude of

silvery-sounding chords, and Reginald sang the old ballad of "Lady Bell." How, despising all the beaux, she gave her heart to a plain young country squire, and left the delights of Ranelagh for the quiet of a village. So dainty and crisp rang the music to the simple story with its Arcadian end.

> "My Lady Bell in gold brocade,
> Looked ne'er so fair or trim a maid
> As when in linsey woollen gown,
> She left for love the noisy town."

And then the door opened as Reginald ended the delightful old song, and surely on the threshold stood my Lady Bell as she appeared at Ranelagh, in powdered hair, in shimmer of gold brocade, with wide hoops and patches on her arch-looking face, with dainty red-heeled shoes and skilfully manipulated fan. It was surely Lady Bell that stepped so stately into the room in the red glare of the fire to the melodious clear-

ness of the gavotte played by Cecilia, who, being whispered to by Reginald, at once seized the spirit of the jest. Or perchance one of the old Garsworth dames had stepped down from her gilt frame, and, attracted by the familiar tinkle of the spinet, had come to see what gay company were assembled in the oak parlour; but no, it was to their eyes Lady Bell, fair and dainty as of old, who swept into the fire-light with tapping of high heels and rustle of stiff brocade.

"We must have lights to see this," cried Dick, jumping up from his chair.

"No, no, I protest!" said Beaumont, lifting up his hand. "It will spoil all. This is not Miss Challoner, but Lady Bell—a ghost from the days of powder and patches come to visit us. She moves in mysterious shadows—a light will cause her to melt away."

"I'm too substantial for that, I'm afraid,"

laughed Una, waving her fan. "But isn't this a charming dress? I found it the other day, and thought I would give you all a fright."

"I don't think you could give any one a fright," whispered Reginald, whereupon she flashed a saucy look at him out of the shadows. The sweet, clear music was still stealing through the room, and Beaumont, in his low, languid voice, talked idly.

"Lady Bell, I admire you vastly. How have you left London and the modish company at Soho? Surely no highwayman stayed you on the way hither in your coach and six? And what of my Lord Mohun? Is there any news at Will's coffee-house, and do the belles admire the new opera of Mr. Handel? Come, tell us the news."

"I would need to be a gazette to do so."

"And you are not—only a fair dead woman from the perished past, come to

show us what wit and beauty went out with powder and patches. Ah, my dear Lady Bell——"

At this moment he was interrupted, for a wild shriek rang through the house, and all present sprang to their feet, looking at one another in wild surmise.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE END OF ALL THINGS.

> We may have died in being born to earth
> Perchance our dying is another birth.

The shriek was uttered by Patience Allerby, and when the whole party, recovering from their surprise, went upstairs they found her leaning against the door of the squire's room, with pale face and terrified-looking eyes. Beyond, half seen in the dim candle-light which illuminated the room, lay a dark shapeless object on the floor.

There was no need to say what had happened, for in the air there was that indescribable feeling which tells of the presence of the great destroyer. Leaving Patience to the care of Beaumont, to whom she clung with convulsive terror, Dr.

Larcher reverently entered as he thought the chamber of death. He bent down to the form lying so still on the floor, and turned the face to the light with tender hand. It was ghastly pale, and from the thin lips there flowed a thin stream of blood; still the vicar saw at a glance that life yet remained, so calling softly to Reginald and Dick, the three men lifted the body up gently and placed it on the bed.

Beaumont had succeeded in somewhat pacifying Patience, and induced the women to go downstairs while he sent for the doctor to examine the sick man. They all re-assembled in the oak parlour, and terrified faces and subdued whispers took the place of merry looks and jocund laughter.

Attracted by the housekeeper's shriek, Dr. Nestley now entered the room, and proceeded to see what he could do towards reviving the squire. Beaumont glanced

keenly at him as he passed, but though his face was pale and heavy-looking, still he was perfectly sober. He caught the artist scrutinising him, and drawing himself up with an angry frown, passed him by without a word.

"What is the matter, doctor?" asked the vicar anxiously, when the young man had concluded his examination.

"Aneurism," he replied briefly. "The body is thoroughly debilitated—he has burst a main artery."

"Is it his heart?" asked Reginald.

"If he had burst any artery in the vicinity of the heart, he would have died at once—even now he cannot live very long—I expected this.

"What produced the rupture?"

"Some sudden emotion, I presume, or violent exercise—here comes the housekeeper; she will tell us all about it."

Patience, looking pale but composed, and

in answer to the interrogatories of the doctor, told the following story:

"The squire was quietly sleeping in bed," she exclaimed calmly, "and I fell asleep in the chair by the side of the bed—he must have arisen and gone to his desk, for I was awakened by a fall, and saw him lying on the floor. I was so startled that I cried out and you came up—I know nothing more."

Owing to the remedies which Dr. Nestley was applying, the sick man now revived, and moaned feebly. Shortly afterwards, opening his eyes he stared wildly at the figures surrounding his bed, and tried to speak, but seemed unable to make any sound beyond an indistinct murmur.

Dr. Larcher came close to the bed, and bending down spoke distinctly and slowly to the dying man.

"You are very ill," he said in a pitying

voice. "I hope you have made your peace with heaven."

With a superhuman effort Garsworth raised himself on his elbow, and stretching out his hand pointed to the desk.

"In there," he gasped. "Blake—there."

The effort was too much for him, for with a choking cry he fell back on the bed a corpse.

Nestley starting to his feet, bent over the bed, and tearing open the squire's shirt, put his hand on his heart—it had ceased to beat.

"He is dead," he said, in a coldly professional manner, "that last effort killed him."

"Dead!" echoed Patience, who was leaning against the curtains with staring eyes and a white terrified face.

"Yes—dead," repeated Dr. Larcher gravely. "We can do no good now," and followed by Reginald and Dick he left the

room, wondering in his own heart what the old man had meant by pointing at the desk while pronouncing Blake's name.

The melancholy news was conveyed to the terrified women downstairs, and shortly afterwards everyone departed, leaving the inmates of the Grange alone with its dead master. Una and Miss Cassy, stunned by the suddenness of the event, retired early to bed, and Jellicks, with the help of Patience, laid the corpse out on the bed ready for the undertaker. Nestley went to his own room and solaced himself with brandy Patience remained by the side of the corpse to watch it during the night, and over all the house there hung a shadow of fear and dread which invested the place with awesome terror.

And that which once held the soul of Randal Garsworth lay on the bed under the heavily-draped canopy—a still white-faced form with the dead hands crossed

on the dead breast, and on the white lips a terrible smile. Candles burned on each side of the body with a sickly light, and a woman with her face buried in her hands knelt praying for the dead man's soul.

"*Oh God who art the Judge of all, have mercy upon the soul of this wretched man.*"

Not a breath of air in the vastness of the room, no sound, no blaze of light—only the pale glimmer of the candles hollowing out a gulf of luminous light in the sombre blackness of the brooding night.

"*O God who art all powerful and just, let not the soul of this man suffer for the sins of his life, for the mind which should have ruled the soul was a wreck and incapable of so ruling.*"

Was there not a sneer upon the still features of the dead man at this prayer for his misspent, useless life—he that despised

prayer and only looked upon his soul as useful to inhabit a new body so that he could make it an instrument by which to enjoy the sensual things of this earth.

Midnight, and the wind is rising—with querulous voice it sweeps through the leafless trees and whistles through the chinks and crannies of the old house, making the dim light of the candles flicker and flare in the dense darkness. No prayer now sounds from the thin lips of the watcher, for a sudden thought has darted through her brain.

"*The letter for my son—I must get it from the desk.*"

She rises softly from her knees, and putting her hand under the pillow whereon rests the head of the corpse, draws forth the keys of the dead man, holding her breath meantime, fearful lest he should arise and lay cold hands upon her. The

keys chink musically in the silence, then with stealthy stride and sound of sweeping dress, she crosses to the desk, bent on obtaining the letter written by the squire to Reginald Blake.

The minutes slowly pass, and the wind is still rising; now howling furiously round the house, shaking the shutters and fluttering the curtains as though wroth at witnessing the sacrilegious theft it is powerless to prevent.

With the letter in her hand, the woman who has committed this crime against the dead for the sake of her son, softly crosses the room towards the bed, replaces the keys in their old place under the pillow, and slipping the letter into her bosom, falls once more upon her knees with tearful eyes and outstretched hands.

"*God! God! if I have sinned in this I pray for pardon, it is for my son's sake, oh God, not for my own.*"

Fearfully she looks at the frozen face, cold and still in the glimmering light of the candles; the dead has not seen, the dead has not heard—her crime is unknown to anyone on earth, but involuntarily she looks upward as though dreading to see the all-seeing eye of God burning menacingly through the gloom. Then with an effort she betakes herself once more to prayer.

"*Oh God, pardon me for my sins, and pardon those of this poor soul who has of late gone into Thy presence.*"

One sinner fresh from the committal of a crime praying for the soul of another sinner.

Oh, the irony—the irony of the prayer.

## CHAPTER XI.

### MR. BEAUMONT WINS HIS CASE.

In truth he had a silver tongue
Whose mild persuasive accents rung
  Like music in her ear;
Despite her dread, despite her hate,
She ever let him rule her fate
And change her heart from joy elate
  To one that ached with fear.

THE shadows of solitude and dreariness had ever hung like ill-omened clouds over Garsworth Grange, but now the shadows were deepened by the presence of death. To the eerie atmosphere of the old house had been added a new element of fear, and every lonely room, every shadowy corner and every echoing corridor seemed to be filled with a weird feeling of the supernatural. Jellicks and

Munks were by no means imaginative folk, but even they, felt the influence of the spell of horror which seemed to brood over the lonely mansion, and conversed in low whispers with furtive looks around, as if expecting a whole host of goblins and spirits to start forth from the brooding shadows. Miss Cassy and Una both kept to their rooms, mutually trying to cheer one another, and the only person who seemed to move about at all was Patience Allerby, who glided through the bare rooms and dusky passages like an unquiet ghost. And not unlike a ghost did she look with her haggard face, burning eyes, and slim figure, carrying with her the paper she had stolen from the sanctity of the dead man's chamber, the paper which hidden in her bosom seemed to her excited fancy to feel bitterly cold, as if its dead owner had grasped it with his chill hand to

drag it forth from its hiding-place. True, the paper would benefit her son, and it was legally his, still the memory of that stealthy theft in the dark night, while yet the corpse lay stiffly on the bed, seemed to haunt her conscious-stricken soul like a crime.

And amid all this horror and dreariness which clung round the place, the dead man lay in his coffin in the dismal room he had occupied during life. No flowers were placed on the bed or on the coffin, no relatives wept over the white set face to melt its frozen apathy with hot tears, no voice of lamentation was heard bewailing a good man's fate; lonely in death as he had been in life, Randal Garsworth, who had sacrificed the pleasures of this earth to a delusion, lay unloved and uncared for in the silent room as if he had lain for generations in the vault of his ancestors.

Sometimes when Munks or Jellicks had taken their turns in watching the body, Patience would come for a time and, kneeling down, pray for the dead man's soul; but the sneering look on the still countenance seemed to mock her prayers, and she fled away in horror at the thoughts that gibing smile provoked.

On the second day after the death of the squire, a visitor came to see Patience, one whom she half expected, and the housekeeper was not at all astonished at beholding Beaumont standing at the door of her room, about four o'clock in the afternoon.

"Why do you come here?" she asked half in anger, half in dread.

"Because I want to speak to you," replied Beaumont, leisurely closing the door and taking a seat. "I know it is not quite the thing to pay visits so soon after a death, but Miss Challoner and her

aunt are, I believe, shut up in their rooms, Munks and that serpent you call Jellicks are safe in the kitchen, so I came in at the back of the house quite unperceived to see you."

"What about?" she asked stolidly.

"I think you can pretty well guess," he replied coolly, "about the conversation I had with you the other day—I want your answer."

"The answer is—no."

"Is it, indeed—ah! we'd better chat over it for a time. I may persuade you to change your mind."

"You'll never do that," she said with a kind of gloomy triumph, "never."

"Indeed — we'll see," he retorted calmly; "by-the-way I hope you don't mind me smoking, but it is so deucedly shivery in this tomb of a house that it gives me the creeps."

"You can smoke," she said curtly.

"Thanks—you know I love my creature comforts."

He rolled himself a cigarette, lighted it, and then blowing a thin cloud of blue smoke, crossed his legs and looked complacently at her.

"So you say no?" he observed with a smile. "Of course you know the consequences?"

"I do."

"And you are prepared to abide by them?"

"I am."

"Noble mother! May I ask your reasons?"

"Yes—and I will tell you my reasons," she said deliberately. "I half intended to agree to your scheme the other day, as I thought it would benefit my son—but now I have found a way to benefit him without participation in your villainy."

"The deuce you have," said Beaumont

curiously. "How clever you are—come tell me all about it."

She smiled coldly at his evident uneasiness, and went on speaking calmly with a certain malignant satisfaction which was not by any means acceptable to Mr. Beaumont.

"I asked the squire before he died to help Reginald Blake, telling him I was the boy's nurse and anxious to see him settled in life, he refused at first but by working on his delusion about re-incarnation I got him to give Reginald a cheque for one hundred pounds."

"Oh, and you think Reginald would prefer one hundred pounds down to ten thousand a year?" he said with an ugly look.

"Reginald doesn't know anything about it; the squire signed the cheque and wrote a letter, enclosed them both in an envelope and sealed it with his arms,

then I, by his directions, locked it up in his desk."

"Where it is still?"

"No, I have got it. I have it here," she said, producing the letter from her bosom and holding it up to him.

"How did you get it?" he asked craftily.

"I watched by the body the first night after death, and remembering where he had put the letter, I took his keys from under his pillow and obtained it, then I locked up the desk and replaced the keys."

"Ah, perhaps you don't know that you have been guilty of a felony?"

"I don't care," she retorted defiantly. "You won't tell?"

"Won't I? that depends; at all events I'd like to look at that letter," he said, stretching out his hand.

She put the letter quickly behind her back.

"No, you won't see it."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't trust you."

"Very well," he said deliberately, "if you don't let me see the contents of the letter, I'll go straight to the lawyers when they arrive and tell them you stole it."

"You would not be such a villain?" she cried in despair.

"I don't see why I shouldn't—you always thought me bad, so why should I give the lie to your estimate of my character by proving myself good?—come, choose—the letter, or the exposure!"

Patience looked at him in despair, as she knew by her fatal admission she was in his power—so, with a sudden gesture of anger, she held the letter out to him.

"Take it."

Beaumont laughed softly, and took the letter daintily between his thumb and fore finger.

"I thought you'd hear reason," he said sneeringly. "Now get me a light."

"To do what?"

"Melt the wax—I want to see what's inside this envelope."

"But you mustn't do that—it's sealed with the Garsworth crest—the lawyers won't pay the cheque if they find the seal has been tampered with."

"I can re-seal it with the Garsworth crest," he replied coolly, "don't be alarmed. I know what I'm about."

She looked at him irresolutely, then apparently recognising the futility of resistance, she lighted a candle and brought it to him.

With a dexterity only acquired by long practice Mr. Beaumont deftly melted the wax of the seal and speedily opened the letter. First he took out the short note, written by the Squire, which he read

aloud to Patience, the contents being as follows:

"*I give you this money to help you in your life. When I am born again in another body, and come to you for help or friendship, you must help me, if I ask, on my reminding you of this money I now give you—for no one but ourselves will know of this transaction, so you can be certain that he who speaks of it to you will be myself in a new body.*

"RANDAL GARSWORTH."

"As mad as ever, I see," said Beaumont, with a sneer, putting down the note. "Now for the cheque."

He glanced at it quickly—saw that it was for one hundred pounds, payable to Reginald Blake, and dated the thirtieth of the month—whereupon he gave a low whistle.

"What's the matter?" asked Patience, quickly.

"To-day, I believe, is the fourteenth?"

"Yes—I know what you're going to say—the cheque is dated the thirtieth—I understand that."

"Yes, and you, doubtless, understand that the Squire died on the twelfth, and that this cheque is waste paper?"

"Waste paper?"

"Exactly—it's dated after the Squire's death, so to all intents and purposes, the Squire was not legally in existence when he signed it."

"What nonsense!" she said impatiently. "I saw him sign it myself."

"Of course you did," he replied smoothly. "You don't seem to understand me—a cheque is generally supposed to be signed on the day it is dated; and as this is dated the thirtieth, and the squire died on the twelfth—well—it's so much waste paper."

"The lawyers will pay it when I explain the circumstances."

"The lawyers have nothing to do with it —the executors might, certainly, recognise it as a claim against the estate, but it is entirely optional with them; if you brought an action, you would, no doubt, recover on the cheque, but I'm afraid the costs would swallow up the amount claimed."

It was in order to get her to consent to join in his scheme that Beaumont thus argued in such a subtle manner, and he certainly succeeded in his plan; for, by taking away her last chance, he reduced her to despair.

"Then I can do nothing to help my son?" she cried, with a terrible expression of anguish on her face.

"Yes, you can—help me to get Reginald the property."

"I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what?" he asked, with supreme contempt, "the law?"

"No!—I'm not afraid of the law—

but I am afraid of the curse this money will be to Reginald, if it's unlawfully obtained."

"Oh, if that is all your objection, I think you can set your mind at rest," replied the artist, with a sneer. "I'll help him to spend the money, and take my share of the curse. Don't talk rubbish—by putting Reginald in possession of ten thousand a year you will be harming no one—the money which should rightfully become Una Challoner's will still become hers by marriage, and two people will be made happy—if you will not help me, I'll tell Reginald all about his birth, and he will remain a pauper—if you help me, he will retain all—if you decline, he will lose everything."

"I do not see what chance I have against you," she cried in despair.

"No more do I!"

"You villain!" she said, furiously.

"Why do you come and tempt me to sin like this?"

"I'm not tempting you to sin—don't I tell you, it will harm no one. Come, give me your answer—yes or no?"

"Yes," she said, faintly, "I agree."

"You will say that Reginald is the son of Fanny Blake and the Squire."

"I will—for his sake."

"I don't care for whose sake you do it," he retorted, brutally, rising to his feet. "You've agreed to help me, so that's all I care about—now I'm going to get the papers."

"Where are they?"

"That's my business," said Beaumont, coolly sauntering to the door. "I'll fix up the necessary proofs, all you've got to do is to tell a consistent story—I'll instruct you. By the way, you are quite sure Una Challoner, and that fool of an aunt, are out of the way?"

"Quite sure — they are in the oak parlour."

"No chance of their coming out?"

"None."

"Very good—then I can get what I want, without suspicion. Have you got the keys of the squire's desk?"

"No, Dr. Nestley took them yesterday from the room, to give them to Miss Una."

"Confound it—has he done so?"

"I do not know."

"That's a nuisance," said Beaumont, reflectively; "I want to put the papers in the squire's desk and lock them up so that they may be found there in a natural manner. I must get those keys. Humph! never mind—I'll hit on some plan; when do the lawyers arrive?"

"To morrow afternoon."

"Well, I'll arrange the papers to night, and bring them to you to-morrow morn-

ing; they must be put in the desk secretly. Now, good-bye at present, and mind, I have your promise."

Patience nodded silently, and turned away with a calm but determined face, while Beaumont went away to carry out the details of his nefarious scheme.

"I have done all I could to resist temptation," she said to herself, bitterly, "I can do no more. If I do sin it is for my son's sake, not my own."

## CHAPTER XII.

### A DEXTEROUS ARRANGEMENT.

Attention to details makes a perfect whole.

When Mr. Beaumont arrived at "The House of Good Living" about six o'clock, he proposed first to have his dinner, and then to go in for a good night's work in arranging all the details of his scheme to place Reginald Blake in the possession of the Garsworth estate.

Though he had told Patience that he would not admit Reginald into his confidence in order to spare the moral nature of the young man, this was hardly the true reason, as, in the first place, he was afraid, from what he had seen of his son, that the young man would not consent to be a party to the swindle,

and, in the second, he wished to keep the true facts of the case to himself, lest Reginald should prove difficult to deal with, in which case, by threatening to dispossess him of the estate, he could keep a firm hand over the unconscious victim of his scheme. Thus, by a little dexterous lying, he benefited in two ways, appearing kindly-disposed in the eyes of Patience, and yet keeping his own secret as a useful weapon in time of need.

As soon as he discovered the squire's secret, he foresaw that he would have to imitate the old man's penmanship in order to fill up the blank spaces in the document addressed by Garsworth to his supposed son, and therefore, having obtained a specimen of the dead man's handwriting he practised assiduously, in order to commit the forgery as dexterously as possible. This was to him a

comparatively easy matter, as he had a pretty talent for imitating handwriting, which he had exercised before, though not in any fashion likely to bring him within reach of the law. Luckily, he had not to sign any name, as the squire had already affixed his signature to the paper, and all he had to do was to fill up the blanks left in the body of the letter. It had evidently not been written very long, and, the ink not having faded, he had to make no preparation to imitate the colour, but merely allow the words he inserted to grow black like the rest of the contents of the document.

He therefore intended to fill up the blanks with the necessary details, re-seal the envelope directed by the squire to Reginald Blake which had contained the cheque, with the seal-ring in his possession, and then, after placing the letter

and ring inside the envelope, re-seal it in such a way as to avert all suspicion.

To this end he shut himself up in his bedroom on finishing his dinner, and spread out before him the document which he had abstracted from its hiding place in the ball-room. The letter addressed by the old man to his supposed son was as follows:

"My Dear Son,

"*You will, doubtless, be surprised at receiving a letter from me, but I have the strongest claim to write to you, as I am your father. I know that you are under the impression that you have a father and mother already; but they are not your real parents. I, Randal Garsworth, am your true father, and*

*of*

*was your mother, and you were born in*

*. Your true parentage*

*was concealed for reasons of my own. I now make the only reparation in my power, which is to put you in possession of my property; for, though you are not my lawful son, you are certainly my lawful heir. Take this letter and the seal-ring enclosed (bearing my crest), which will be found among my papers after my decease, and see my lawyers, Messrs. Binks & Bolby, of Glutcher's Lane, in the City of London, and they will be sufficient to prove your identity as my son. I have made my will in your favour, saying you will produce the ring and this letter as a proof of your identity. The will is, of course, in the possession of my lawyers as above mentioned, and I hope you will carry out the instructions regarding legacies, etc., mentioned in my said will. As we have been strangers, it would be folly for me to express any regret, and all I can say is, that I hope the amount*

*of the estate I leave you will compensate for the moral stain on your name.*

"*I remain*

"*Your affectionate father,*

"RANDAL GARSWORTH."

After reading this extraordinary document Beaumont laid it down and laughed heartily. Of course, Garsworth was quite mad, therefore his folly was excusable; but that he should think to claim his property on such flimsy evidence was really the strongest proof of his insanity.

"Luckily," observed Mr. Beaumont to himself, "I can supply all the missing links by bringing forward Patience to prove the birth of Reginald as Fanny Blake's child in London, explain the absence of registration and baptismal certificates, and give a much more definite birthplace than he was likely to give."

He thereupon applied himself to his work, and, after practising the names he wished to fill in, on pieces of waste-paper, he inserted them in the original document, the clause which gave him all the work reading as follows:

"*I, Randal Garsworth, am your true father, and Fanny Blake, of Garsworth, was your mother, and you were born in Chelsea, London.*"

Having finished this with infinite pains, Mr. Beaumont eyed his work in a very complacent manner.

"When that ink is dry," he said, thoughtfully, "it will turn as black as the rest of the writing. I'll wait till to-morrow morning before I put it into the envelope, just to see how the names look by daylight."

He took the letter written by the squire

to Reginald and also the cheque, and placed them carefully away in one compartment of his pocket-book; then he placed the envelope, the seal ring and the original document wide open, in a small despatch-box, so that the ink would dry properly. Having locked the box, he put the key in his pocket, lighted a cigarette, and considered his next move.

"I must get the letter locked up in the squire's desk," he said to himself. "But how? Very likely Nestley has given the keys to Una Challoner, then there will be no chance. If I can't get the keys to lock it up, I'll slip it among some loose papers in the desk to-morrow—but it would look better locked up. I think I'll walk over to the Grange and find out if Nestley has the keys still."

On going downstairs, however, he discovered that there was no need for him to

walk to the Grange, as he found Nestley seated in the parlour, apparently in very low spirits, drinking hot whisky and water. When he saw Beaumont his face flushed, and he looked away, for the unhappy man, having lost his self-respect, felt his moral degradation keenly.

Beaumont, however, pretended not to notice his action, but advancing towards him shook hands warmly, and asked after his health in the friendliest manner possible. Nestley was cold and short in his replies at first, but under the quiet warmth of Beaumont's fascinating manner began to talk more amiably.

"Excuse me drinking this hot whisky. It's so very cold to-night," he said, in a deprecating tone, "and I've had a long walk from the Grange."

"Yes, and you'll have a cold walk back," said Beaumont, in a sympathetic manner.

"I'm not going back," replied Nestley sadly, looking down at the table.

"Not going back," echoed the artist; "why not?"

"I've finished my business at the Grange, and it is no use my staying there; besides, Miss Challoner dislikes me so much that it was painful for me to live in the same house with her."

"How do you know she dislikes you?"

"It's easily seen; her manner is quite sufficient—besides, by persuading me to give way to this again," he added vehemently, touching his glass, "you have caused me to lose all hope and self-respect; every person who looks at me seems to be pitying my downfall."

"Well, then, give up the drink."

"What's the good?" said Nestley despairingly. "I left it off for five years, yet such is my weak nature

that I yielded to your persuasions, and now it has got complete mastery of me again."

"You seem determined to regard me as your evil genius," said the artist deliberately. "Why I do not know. I suggested a little wine on that evening, in order to cheer you up—that is all."

"All! and quite enough too. You knew, in the old days, when I took one glass it meant more."

"I am not to blame for your weakness."

"No doubt—but knowing that weakness you might have left me alone."

"Well, well," said Beaumont impatiently, "my back is broad enough to bear your sins as well as my own. What are you going to do now?"

"Stay here for two or three days, and then go away," replied Nestley. "I've risked my all on the cast of a die—and lost,

so I'm going back to my own town, and live out the remainder of my life as best I can."

"Have you said good-bye to Miss Challoner?"

"No, nor do not intend to; she knows my degradation. I can see it in her eyes, in her manner, in the way she shrinks from me. I have lost the best part of myself—my self-respect."

Beaumont was hard and callous as a rule, but he could not help feeling a pang of pity for the abject misery of the man whom he had brought so low.

"Come, come, Nestley," he said cheerily, patting the doctor on the back, "I'm truly sorry I ever persuaded you to touch the wine, but you'd better leave this place at once. When you are back again, in your own home, you will once more take up your old life of temperance and hard work."

"It is too late—the evil is done."

"Rubbish! it's never too late to mend; leave Garsworth without delay."

"And leave you to make love to Miss Challoner!"

"I," said Beaumont, with an enigmatic smile, "nonsense—I'm past the age of love—you can make your mind easy on that score; but, as I will probably see Miss Challoner, shall I make your adieux to her?"

"If you like," returned Nestley gloomily, "and give her these keys—they belonged to the Squire, and I forgot to give them into her possession."

Here was a wonderful piece of luck; the very keys he was in search of, delivered into his hands without any difficulty whatsoever.

Beaumont did not believe in astrology, but surely at that moment he must have thought his lucky star was in the

ascendant. With his habitual craftiness, however, he suppressed all outward manifestations of joy, and took the keys from Nestley with an assenting smile.

"I won't forget," he said calmly, slipping them into his pocket, "and you will take my advice about leaving the village."

"Why are you so anxious for me to go?" asked Nestley, suspiciously.

"For your own good."

"And for your own ends too, I've no doubt," retorted the doctor bitterly. "You never did anything in your life without a motive."

"Very well," said Beaumont, strolling to the door, "if you don't choose to take my advice, stay here and drink yourself to death, as you will surely do—please yourself, my friend."

"Please myself," echoed Nestley, when the door closed on Beaumont. "I intend

to, Basil Beaumont—you've got some plan to carry out, or you would not remain so placidly in this dull village—so I'll stay and see the game out; and, if I can thwart you I will, if it's only to punish you for the evil you have done to me."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### UNA MAKES A CONFESSION.

He may be poor, and quite unknown,
In rank there may be men above him;
But my heart beats for him alone,
You ask the reason; this—I love him.

The next morning Beaumont examined the important document, upon which hung the fate of his scheme, in order to see by the searching light of day if a close scrutiny would reveal in any palpable degree his alterations. According to his expectations, it appeared eminently satisfactory, for the words he had inserted had turned quite black, and assumed the ebon tint of the rest of the handwriting, so to an ordinary observer the entire document appeared to have been written by one person. True, if it were submitted to experts in a court

of law, the forgery might be detected ; but Beaumont was quite satisfied in his own mind that the paper would never have to stand such a test. The directions in the will, the production of the paper and seal-ring mentioned therein, and the evidence of Patience Allerby as to the birth of Reginald, would be quite strong enough evidence to put him in possession of the property, even if Una should contest the claim, which he knew she would not do when she found that the heir who ousted her from her rightful position was Reginald Blake.

Being therefore perfectly satisfied, Mr. Beaumont took the envelope, directed by the squire to Reginald Blake, at the Vicarage, and having placed some new wax on the closing fold, he stamped it with the Garsworth crest by means of the seal ring. Then placing the document he had so carefully prepared inside, together with the

ring, he melted the under portion of the wax until it became soft, and firmly closed the letter so that no one, from its appearance, could detect the fraud.

This being done, he placed the important letter, together with the keys given to him by Nestley, in his breast coat pocket, and set off gaily to the Grange, in order to place it where it could be easily found.

He had invented some trivial explanation to give to Una and Miss Cassy should he meet them before carrying out his plan, and, of course, on having done so, the mission of delivering the keys to Una would be ample excuse for his intrusion on their grief. Fate, however, stood his friend, for by going round to a side door he was enabled to enter the house, and go to the housekeeper's room, unseen by anyone, save Jellicks, who admitted him.

Patience, looking pale and worn, arose to receive him, and he half dreaded to glance

at her, lest she should have altered her mind. Her first remark, however, reassured him at once.

"Have you arranged everything?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes! Here is the precious document," he replied, producing the envelope, "and here are the keys of the squire's desk."

"Where did you get them?"

"From Nestley; he gave them to me to return to Miss Challoner, as I intend to do after placing this letter in the squire's desk. There's no time to be lost, Patience—take me up to the room at once."

"Wait a moment," she replied cautiously, growing a shade paler. "I'd better go and see that Miss Cassy and Miss Una are safe in the oak parlour first. Wait here."

She glided out of the room like a ghost, and after an absence of ten minutes re-

turned to Beaumont with a more composed expression on her face.

"They are at breakfast," she said in a whisper, "no chance of being disturbed by them. Come along, but make no noise. Every sound echoes through this old place."

Silently and stealthily they stole along the dark passages, which, owing to the light filtering through grimy windows, had a dusky appearance. Softly over the echoing pavement of the gloomy hall, up the wide staircase with the old Garsworths frowning on them from the walls, as if they knew their wicked errand, along the chill length of the upper corridor, and then the slow turning of the key in the lock, the gentle opening of the door, and they stood in the presence of the dead.

So still, so lonely, so cold, with the heavy curtains drawn over the wide windows, only admitting faint streaks of light,

which stole whitely through the heavy atmosphere of the room. On the bed was the black coffin, with the dead man laid therein.

On either side tall candles were burning with a sickly light, and the heavy draperies of the bed hung motionless as if frozen with horror. In the dim shadows of the far end of the room, where the faint daylight and the faint candle light produced an unnatural twilight, stood the desk, and towards it Beaumont stepped with stealthy activity, suggestive of the sinuosity of a tiger. After him, soft-footed and pale, stole the woman.

"In which recess did you lock up the letter?" he asked in a low whisper.

She indicated the place with outstretched finger, and shuddered as she heard the click of the key turning in the lock. A subdued rustle of papers, a soft shutting sound, another click as the key turned

again, and the first part of the scheme was achieved.

In the shadowy light of the room their faces looked pale and haggard, as they sped silently and rapidly towards the door, as though they feared lest the dead man should arise from his coffin and call upon them to stop. Did no frown pass over that marble face? Did no sound hint to them that a disembodied spirit stood near the bed wailing over the failure of its cherished scheme through the treachery of humanity? No, all was still as the grave as the two conspirators glided out of the room, along the corridor, down the stairs, and found themselves once more in the housekeeper's room.

"Faugh!" said Beaumont, on whose pale face the beads of perspiration were standing, "what unpleasant work. Give me some brandy."

The housekeeper silently left the room,

and shortly returned with a liqueur glass of the liquor, which he tossed off rapidly, and the effect was soon seen in the glow which came over his face.

"You ought to have some yourself," he suggested, handing her back the glass.

"I don't require it," she replied coldly. "I'm used to the atmosphere of this house. You are not."

"It's like a charnel-house," he said, with a look of disgust. "Well, I've done my part of the affair. Now, all you've got to do is to swear Reginald is Fanny Blake's son. I'll leave it to your ingenuity to tell a good story."

"You can be certain of that," she replied coldly. "I've done with all scruples, and since it is to enrich my son, you may be sure I will do my best. And now I suppose, in order to avert all suspicion, you'd better see Miss Una."

"Yes, of course. I want to return her

these keys," he replied, jingling the bunch. "If any questions are asked, of course you can swear I have not been out of this room. But I don't think you need be afraid, everything will go quite smooth. There is a strong motive."

"And the motive?"

"Una's love for Reginald. Now go and tell her I am here."

When Patience left the room on her errand he dusted his boots with his handkerchief, pulled down his shirt-cuffs and settled his tie and hair in the mirror over the fire-place. By the time Patience returned he had quite recovered his nonchalant manner, and was humming a tune when she entered.

"Well?" he asked, facing round.

"It's all right. She will see you," replied the housekeeper, and, catching up his hat and stick, Beaumont followed her along the passage to the oak parlour.

Una and Miss Cassy, both in deep mourning, were seated at the breakfast-table when he entered, and as the door closed on Patience, he apologised for disturbing them.

"Of course I would not have thought of intruding on your grief," he said, in a courtly manner, "but the fact is, Miss Challoner, I have a message for you from Doctor Nestley."

"Ah, poor, dear doctor," whimpered Miss Cassy, dabbing her red eye-lids with a pocket handkerchief. "He's gone away—so very odd."

"I don't think so, aunt," observed Una, quietly. "He had done all he could for my poor cousin, and now it would be merely wasting his time for him to remain. What is the message, Mr. Beaumont?"

"Just to give you these keys," he said, handing the bunch to her. "They be-

longed to the squire, and Nestley picked them up after the death, intending to give them to you, only he forgot all about them till it was too late, so asked me to bring them to you."

Una took the keys with a grave bow.

"Thank you very much, Mr. Beaumont," she said, putting them in her pocket. "It was very kind of you to bring them. I trust Dr. Nestley is well?"

Beaumont shrugged his shoulders, the meaning of which action she understood with feminine quickness.

"Let us hope he will be quite well when he returns home," she said with emphasis, her colour rising. "I am truly sorry for him. Where did he contract this unfortunate habit?"

"Oh, in London, I believe," said Beaumont, carelessly. "I knew him there five or six years ago. He was very fast in those days. Then he pulled up and reformed

altogether. I am sorry to see him resuming his old habits."

Mr. Beaumont did not think it necessary to explain how he had tempted the unhappy young man, so poor Nestley was blamed severely by both ladies for his evident tendency to fast living.

"So dreadful," piped Miss Cassy, lifting up her hands. "I really cannot understand it, and the dear doctor was so nice. Really, it's very odd. Oh, are you going, Mr. Beaumont? So sorry—good-bye."

Beaumont bowed to both the ladies and then left the room, quite satisfied with his interview.

"I think I have fixed up everything satisfactorily," he muttered to himself, as he lighted a cigarette outside on the terrace. "If Patience only carries out her part of the affair as well as I have done mine, we'll soon put Reginald in possession of the property, and then—it's my turn."

Miss Cassy watched him cross the terrace, and turned to Una with a look of admiration in her eyes.

"What a handsome man Mr. Beaumont is—so distinguished?" she said volubly. "Quite like a Spanish what's-his-name, you know."

"He's not bad-looking," replied Una, absently, "but I prefer Reginald."

"Mr. Blake?" said Miss Cassy, rather astonished to hear her niece speak of him in such a familiar way.

Una saw that she had betrayed herself, so, going over to the elder lady, put her arms round her waist caressingly.

"Auntie, you must have seen it all the time."

"Seen what?" asked Miss Cassy, opening her eyes widely.

"That I love Reginald."

"Love Reginald Blake! Oh, my dear—how very odd."

"I don't see it's odd at all," replied Una, blushing, "we love one another very dearly."

"But, my dear, he's nobody."

"He's everybody—in my eyes," said Una, fondly.

"What would the Squire have said?" observed Miss Cassy, in dismay.

"Forbidden the marriage, I've no doubt," replied Una, "so that is why we kept our engagement quiet—but now we are free to marry."

"Oh, Una, how heartless you are—so odd, and the poor Squire just dead."

"My dear auntie," said Una gravely, "I am the last person in the world to speak ill of the dead, but I cannot feign a regret which I do not feel; the Squire asked us down here for his own gratification—not ours; we have lived on our own money, and not his; he has taken no notice of us at all—so neither you nor I can pretend to

weep over the death of a man whom we hardly ever saw, and who certainly did nothing to deserve tears."

"But still, he may have left you his fortune," urged Miss Cassy in a tearful voice.

"I doubt it," replied Una, with a sigh, "but fortune or no fortune, I cannot pretend to a grief I do not feel."

"And you are quite determined to marry Reginald Blake?"

"Quite—we love each other devotedly."

"I'm sure I hope so," said poor Miss Cassy, whimpering, "it's just like a romance of what's-his-name—so very odd; he is good-looking, I know—but money—he's got no money."

"I don't want money—I want him."

"He's got no name."

"He'll make one with his voice."

"I'm sure," cried Miss Cassy, in despair, "I can't see what you see in him."

Una closed the argument in a most decisive manner.

"I love him."

This remark was unanswerable, so Miss Cassy dissolved in tears.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE SQUIRE'S WILL.

"How strange a testament is this, my lord?
The outcome of a most fantastic brain.
'Tis but a mirror that reflects his life,
With all its twists and turns and madcap arguments."

Mr. Bolby, the junior partner in the legal firm who had control of the Squire's business, was a little, red-faced man, with a round head set upon an equally round body, which, in its turn, was supported by two short, sturdy legs. His face was clean shaven, save for two little tufts of white hair, which stood out on each cheek in startling contrast to the crimson of his complexion, and his baldish head was sparsely scattered over with similar tufts. He dressed in somewhat gay manner, and had a loud, cheerful voice of a chirpy

nature, also a curious habit of using the same words twice over in different ways.

On arriving from London at the Grange he was handed the Squire's keys by Una, and at once proceeded to look over all the private papers of the dead man. Evidently he had some object in doing so, for he never rested until he had examined every document in the desk, and having made himself master of the precise state of affairs, rested quietly until the day of the funeral, varying the monotony of this somewhat dreary life by paying frequent visits to the vicarage, where he had several lively arguments with Dr. Larcher on archæological subjects.

At last the day of the funeral arrived, and the dead man was borne with great pomp to the ancestral vault in Garsworth Church, where numerous generations of the family had already mouldered for many centuries. Some of the county families

came to the funeral, but most of them sent their carriages to represent them, as Randal Garsworth, owing to his secluded life, had been by no means popular, and they only came themselves or sent their representatives from a sense of courtesy.

So the long procession, headed by the ponderous hearse with its stately black horses and nodding plumes, left the coldness of Garsworth Grange for the similar coldness of the family vault, and on arriving at the lichgate of the grave-yard, were met by Dr. Larcher and his curate. The coffin was taken into the church, and the vicar read the funeral service in his most impressive manner, after which Cecilia played the "Dead March" from "Saul," and the remains of Randal Garsworth were conveyed to their last resting-place in the dismal vault. This being done, the heavy doors were once more closed until the death of some other member of the family would

require them to be opened, and the greater part of the mourners went their different ways, while Dr. Larcher, accompanied by Reginald and Dick, returned to the Grange in company with Mr. Bolby, to hear the will read.

Dr. Larcher was obliged to be present, as he was co-executor with Mr. Bolby, and he took his two pupils with him for the sake of company, Reginald being nothing loth, as he had not seen Una since the death of the Squire.

So charming she looked in her black dress as she stood amid the faded splendour of the drawing-room, receiving the visitors with graceful courtesy. Her manner was calm and self-possessed, and she did not give way to any manifestations of grief on the death of her cousin, a contrast to Miss Cassy, who loudly bewailed the Squire's decease, as if he had been her dearest and most intimate friend.

"Such a gentleman as he was," she whimpered, wiping her eyes, "quite one of the old school — a regular what's-his-name of the Regency — very odd, isn't it?"

Dr. Larcher himself thought that Miss Cassy's ostentatious grief was very odd, seeing it was for a person of whom she had seen very little, but he said nothing beyond a few words of sympathy, as he quite understood Miss Cassy to be one of those demonstrative people who weep alike at funeral or wedding, and display their feelings openly on the least occasion.

After partaking of some cake and wine, Mr. Bolby seated himself in a stately manner in order to read the will, and everyone prepared to listen. Dr. Larcher looked pityingly at Una, for he knew the contents of the will and what a blow it would be for her to lose the property, but as he had expostulated with the Squire at the time of

executing it he could do no more, so things had to take their course.

"This will, gentlemen and ladies," chirped Mr. Bolby, putting on his spectacles, "ladies and gentlemen, this will was made five or six years back by my client deceased —my deceased client being then, as I have no reason to doubt, in full possession of his senses, that is, he had his senses in full. I will now read the will, and of course you will please listen attentively to the will read by me."

It was not a very long document, as, after leaving small legacies to Patience, Jellicks and Munks, the Squire had bestowed upon Una an income of a thousand a year, and all the rest of his property was left to Dr. Larcher and Simon Bolby in trust for the natural son of the deceased, who would prove his claim in due time by producing a letter written by his father, and also the seal ring of the family.

There was a considerable sensation at the conclusion of Mr. Bolby's reading, as no one thought the Squire had any offspring, and, in spite of her presentiment that she would never get the property, Una could not help feeling disappointed, as it seemed to be a bar to her marriage with Reginald. However, she had a thousand a year, and they could live on that, so after a moment's reflection, she did not grudge this unknown son his good fortune.

Miss Cassy, however, was not so easily satisfied, and loudly expressed her anger at the Squire's duplicity, which sounded rather comical considering how she had been previously praising up his virtues.

"So dreadful!" she said indignantly, "a son we never heard of—how very odd!— who is his mother?—where was he born? what is his name? — is most peculiar."

"It is very peculiar," assented Mr. Bolby drily, "particularly when I tell you I don't know any of the three things you have stated—that is, the three things stated by you."

"Do you tell me, sir," asked the vicar in his ponderous manner, "that you don't know the name of this son?"

"No."

"Nor the name of his mother?"

"No."

"Nor his birthplace?"

"I give you my word of honour," said Mr. Bolby solemnly, "that I am absolutely ignorant of all these — of all these, my dear sir, I am ignorant absolutely."

All present looked at one another in blank astonishment, and it was some time before anyone could speak. Una was the first to recover, and at once addressed herself to the lawyer.

"If this is the case" she said slowly, "how is this unknown son to claim the estate?"

"Did you not hear the will read, my dear lady?" replied Mr. Bolby equably. "Did you not hear me read the will? The son must produce a letter written to him by his father, and also the seal ring of the family."

"But you surely would not give an unknown man the estate on such slight evidence?"

"What can I or Dr. Larcher do," said the lawyer with a deprecating shrug, "Dr. Larcher and myself; what can we do? If he has the papers and the ring, he is undoubtedly the heir if he produces the ring and the papers."

"It is the will of a lunatic," cried Miss Cassy angrily.

"I assure you he was in his right mind when it was written," chirped Mr. Bolby

placidly, "my dear lady, in his right mind I assure you."

"I will contest this will," said Una firmly.

"Better wait, my dear young lady," said the lawyer, "my dear young lady, better wait—till the heir appears."

"But suppose he never appears?" suggested Dr. Larcher.

"Oh, he'll turn up all right," said Bolby calmly, "people don't give up ten thousand a year so easily—no—ten thousand is not so easily given up by people."

"But Mr. Bolby," said Una in despair, "is there no note or certificate among my cousin's papers which can lead to the identification of this unknown person?"

Mr. Bolby produced a letter from his breast coat pocket. "Now we are coming to it," he said with great glee. "I thought such a thing might be possible;

so as it was possible such a thing might be, I searched and found this letter—it is sealed with the arms of the family, and was found by me locked up in his private desk, so everything so far is in order—I'm sure you will agree there is order in everything so far; it certainly has a ring in it, for a ring is inside certainly, as I can feel it. To my mind this envelope contains the letter and ring mentioned in the will."

The curiosity of everyone was now roused to the highest point and Una asked the next question amid a breathless silence.

"To whom is the letter addressed?"

A profound silence ensued, during which the proverbial pin might have been heard to drop, as the lawyer replied solemnly and slowly.

"The letter is addressed to 'Mr. Reginald Blake, Vicarage, Garsworth.'"

"Addressed to me?" cried Reginald in an astonished voice, springing to his feet. "Impossible!"

"See for yourself," replied Bolby, handing him the letter.

Reginald took the letter in silence and stood holding it irresolutely for a few moments, during which time he glanced round at the astonished faces present. At last with an effort he tore open the envelope, but overcome with emotion seemed unable to proceed further, and crossing the room, gave the opened envelope to the vicar.

Dr. Larcher arose from his seat as he took the letter and looked steadily at the young man.

"Do you wish me to read it?" he asked slowly.

Reginald bowed silently, and sat down in the vicar's chair.

Whereupon Dr. Larcher took the letter

out of the envelope, leaving the ring still inside, and having opened it, read the contents in a slow, deliberate manner. Everyone listened in amazement to the extraordinary disclosure, and every eye was fixed on Reginald, who sat in his chair with his face buried in his hands.

"This then," said the vicar folding up the letter, "proves that you Reginald are the son of Randal Garsworth and Fanny Blake, for here is the letter, and here is the ring."

He stepped up to the lawyer and solemnly delivered both to him, then returning to his seat laid his hand kindly on Blake's shoulder.

"You hear what I have read," he observed sonorously. "What do you say?"

"Say?" cried the young man, springing to his feet with a pale, haggard-looking face, "that it's a lie—you know yourself,

sir, that I'm not the squire's son—Patience knows all about my birth—it is honourable—honourable. I—I am not the son of that man," and the poor young fellow fairly broke down.

On hearing Reginald was the heir to the property a great joy appeared in Una's face, but it gave place to a look of pity and sorrow as she saw how keenly he felt the ignoble circumstances of his birth.

"There is only one thing to be done in order to make sure," she said, rising. "Call Patience Allerby."

Dick Pemberton went out of the room to fetch her, and during the dead silence which now prevailed Una walked across the room to Reginald and took his hand.

"This makes no difference to me," she whispered fondly. "Do not think that your birth will stand in the way of our marriage, I love you too well for that."

"God bless you," he muttered brokenly, and clasped her hand convulsively.

The housekeeper entered the room looking pale and worn, with a hard, defiant expression on her face, as if she was determined to face the affair out to the bitter end, as indeed she was. On hearing her footstep Reginald arose unsteadily to his feet and looked at her anxiously. On seeing the anguish in his face she seemed to falter for a moment, but soon recovered, and veiled her agony under stolid composure.

"Patience," said Reginald in a broken voice, "I have learned by a letter from Squire Garsworth that I am his son, and that Fanny Blake was my mother—is it true?"

She bowed her head and replied slowly.

"Perfectly true."

Reginald flung up his hands with a cry of anguish and fell back in his chair—it

was true—the possession of ten thousand a year could never cleanse away the stain which rested on his birth.

"Why did you deceive the lad?" asked Dr. Larcher sternly.

"By order of his father," she replied doggedly. "If you remember, sir, I went to London with Fanny Blake over twenty-two years ago; she told me the squire had ruined her, and that was why she left the village; six months afterwards her child was born and she died. I brought the baby down to the village to the squire, he refused to recognise his own offspring, but said he would pay for the boy's keep, so to save the good name of the child, I invented the story of the parents dying in France, and placed it in your care, and he has grown up all these years under the name of Reginald Blake."

"And Reginald Blake is the squire's son?"

"Yes. I hope he has done the boy justice at last."

"He has. By his will Reginald Blake is acknowledged as master of Garsworth Grange."

Patience gave a cry of delight, and with a face beaming with tenderness approached the young man. He arose slowly from his chair as she came near him, fixing his wild eyes in horror on her face. She saw the look and half recoiled, but offered her congratulations timidly.

"You are now rich—" she began, when he interrupted her furiously.

"Rich!—rich! Who cares for riches? I am dishonoured for the rest of my life. I have no right to the name I bear. You have deceived and tricked me with your lies, leading me to believe that my birth at least was without dishonour, and now—now, I find my life has been one long lie. Do you think money will ever repay me

for the stain on my birth? I declare to God that I would willingly become the pauper I was if I could only regain my self-respect with my poverty. Look at me all of you. I am rich! young, and a bastard!"

With a cry of passionate anger he rushed from the room, and with an answering cry of anguish Patience Allerby fell fainting on the floor.

END OF VOL. II.

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